

RELIGION AS
EXPERIENCE

JOHN WRIGHT BUCKHAM



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Religion as experience

By the Same Author
MYSTICISM AND MODERN LIFE

RELIGION AS EXPERIENCE

BY ✓

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DEDICATED

TO THE MEMBERS, IN BOTH WORLDS,
OF CROMBIE STREET CHURCH
IN SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS,
IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE
OF A PASTORATE OF TWELVE YEARS,
WHICH HAS BECOME TO THE AUTHOR
A FRAGRANT MEMORY
AND AN ENDURING INCENTIVE
TO FAITH IN GOD AND MEN

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PREFACE

THE following addresses and articles, all concerned with aspects of a central theme, will, I think, exhibit a unity, and I hope a harmony, such as to warrant bringing them together in a volume. The varied viewpoints of the reviews in which the articles appeared indicate how widely welcomed is the discussion of religion as experience.

My thanks are extended to The University of California Chronicle, The Constructive Quarterly, the Methodist Quarterly Review, The Hibbert Journal, The Homiletic Review, and The Biblical World for permission to use the respective articles accredited to each in the text. Further indebtednesses will appear to the reader as he pursues his way; and others there are which neither writer nor reader can define, including One which I trust has not been unfelt throughout.

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RELIGION AS EXPERIENCE¹

THE deeper thought of our time is turning away from religion as dogma, as sentiment, as theory, as ethics, to religion as *experience*. Not that this concept excludes the others, but is at once the more definitive and inclusive.

I

What, then, do we mean—let this be our first inquiry—by the term “experience” in its common, not in its technical, sense? In the first place, we mean—do we not?—*something that is one’s own*, that affects *oneself*, that has penetrated the privacy of his individual existence. We mean—to use a crude illustration—something like what would happen to the puppet in the shooting gallery if he were conscious and able to say, when the ball or the bullet strikes, “I am hit.” Experience, that is, means “I am hit.” Whether any others are hit at the same time or not is a secondary matter. The main fact for the experient is: “This thing, whatever it may be, has come home to me. It has entered and domiciled in my private in-

¹ An address delivered before the Philosophical Union of the University of California and published in *The University Chronicle*, October, 1915.

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closure, where I must live with it, for better or worse, for longer or shorter.”

In the second place, experience means *something felt*. One cannot have an experience without sensation or emotion of some kind. The experient cannot be indifferent—except in the sense of schooling himself not to yield to his feelings. The puppet in the shooting gallery, to have an experience, would have not only to recognize, “I am hit,” but “I am *hit*. I feel it.” Now there is *feeling* and *feeling*. Nor is it a mere difference of intensity but of kind and quality. We have been too gross altogether in our ideas of feeling, as if it were all of one nature, yet Janus-faced—pleasure and pain. On the other hand, there are colors and tones in feeling as diverse and delicate as in music and painting, and some are both pleasurable and painful at the same time. We need a psychology so sensitive to these differences that it would be no longer possible to mass all our emotions and sensations indiscriminately under the one term “feeling” and then pass predicates upon it as if it were all alike devoid of intelligence and of ethical and spiritual qualities and values. There are feelings that are obscuring and debasing and there are those that are illuminating and sacred.

Once more, an experience is *something known*.

It is not only something felt but something apprehended. I do not mean *understood*. That would involve an outside and all-around knowledge of an experience in all its relations and implications. But it is something grasped as real and thus set among the facts enough of whose own nature is seen, so that when it returns one can say to it: "Here you are again. I know you; you and I have been in close quarters. I am aware not only of the feelings which you arouse; I know something of yourself." Into the discussion of what kind of knowledge this of experience is, we will not enter. As Bergson would say, it is at least *inside* knowledge.

We are not meaning to say by this that experiential knowledge is purely empirical in its nature. There is no such thing as purely empirical knowledge. The mind enters into all knowledge as the constructive, architectonic factor. What I am insisting upon is the superiority of the kind of knowledge which—though constructed by the mind—is inner, sympathetic, experiential, to that which is external, descriptive, discursive.

We have been describing experience as if it were something purely passive, at least until we began to speak of the knowledge factor in it. This receptive element is essential. Experience does not arise out of the mind itself

alone. It is due to something or someone that impinges upon us. And yet in the activity that arises out of this impingement the mind, or, rather, the whole self, asserts itself and thus constructs the experience and makes it what it is. So that it is not the puppet who best illustrates the experience, but the person who does the hitting. Better still, experience includes *both* action and reaction, the experience both of the hit and the hitter. In every genuine experience one is both passive and active, both receptive and constructive.

It is this *wholeness* and *awareness* that characterize experience. Experience is not pure sensation. Neither is it pure reflection. It is thinking, feeling, willing, all in one. It is *realization*.

II

If such is the nature of experience in general, what of that form of it that we call "religious" experience?

Manifestly, this is an order of experience outside the realm of our ordinary or sense experience. It is not necessarily supernatural in the sense of being remote from our every-day life as persons, but it is extra-sensuous. It has to do with another and higher sphere of reality. Again we must remind you that we are using

the term "experience" in a far from strictly Kantian sense. But it is a common usage; and wisdom is justified of her children.

In the realm of religion experience has the same qualities characteristic of all experience. It is something directly felt and known by oneself for himself. In this sphere experience often goes by the name of "faith," which is "a conviction of an axiomatic character which refuses to be analyzed into reasons, and which, indeed, precedes all reasons."²

Is there, then, a religious experience of this distinct and self-attesting kind? If so, what is it?

In searching for an answer to this question, in the first place we would have you take preliminary account of the very general conviction, or impression, that reality is wider and more inclusive than the limits of the material world. As President Woodrow Wilson once said: "Even men of science now feel that the explanation which they give of the universe is so partial an explanation, so incomplete an explanation, that for the benefit of their own thought—quite aside from the benefit of their own souls—it is necessary that something should be added to it. They know that there

² See *Rudolf Eucken*, by Abel J. Jones, p. 76.

is a spiritual segment in the complete circle of knowledge which they cannot supply and which must be supplied if the whole circle is not to show its imperfection and incompleteness."³

If this is true, as I think many men of science would themselves say, it is extremely significant. It indicates that those who know most about the physical world feel that it does not encompass all reality, that there is something over and above material existence which cannot be ignored. If scientists feel this way, how much more the rest of us, bathed as we are in mystery, moved by impulses which we cannot explain and thoughts which we cannot fathom—except when we are philosophizing.

Yet this sense of the unexplained margin is only the negative side of this experience. It has a positive side. Countless millions of men and women have had the conviction, ranging all the way from a dim and shadowy impression to the most complete and regnant certainty, of a Something, or a Someone, Out There or Near at Hand, Far Away or Within the Soul, Transcendent or Immanent, or both. The savage religionist called It "Mana"; the Israelite dared not name It; Confucius termed It "Heaven"; the Brahman "Atman," the

³ Hartford Seminary Record, vol. xix, No. 3, p. 227.

Self; Plato conceived of It as "The Good"; Aristotle as "The Unmoved Mover"; Plotinus, "The One"; Spinoza, "The All"; Jesus called It "Father"; Paul, "Him that filleth all in all"; Hegel, "Spirit"; Fichte, "Will"; Matthew Arnold, "The Power not Ourselves"; Spencer, "The Unknowable." All these are *ideas*, attempts to enfold a Reality that proves too great and manifold for complete enclosure.

"But can we have the experience of such a reality and not have an idea to embody the experience?" Surely not. The intellect, or interpretative faculty, is essential to our inner life. Idea is related to experience as the body is related to the spirit. They cannot be severed. And yet the experience underlies the idea and is greater than it, just as the soul or personality undergirds and is greater than the body. Moreover, the harmony is often imperfect. The idea often thwarts and misrepresents the experience, as the body does the soul. Sometimes the idea burgeons and dilates while experience fades and pales. Sometimes it remains when the experience has fled—a corpse that mocks at reality and cries to heaven for either revitalization or burial.

It should be our constant care and duty to keep experience and idea in the closest possible accord; for they react upon each other. He

who flouts or ignores ideas in the interest of experiences makes as disastrous a blunder as he who flouts experiences in the interest of ideas.

III

This deeply rooted human experience, or conviction, of Something transcending the world of sense and time is seen upon reflection to be, in the very nature of the case, not merely Something but *Someone*. In other words, It cannot be less, or lower than, ourselves in nature and worth, else It would cease to command our reverence and allegiance. If It were only blind unconscious Force, however mighty, It would be only another Thing or Potency, like Electricity, capable of arousing our interest, but not of stirring that deep and moving experience of which we have been speaking.

This means no less, I take it, than that in the very nature of this experience itself is involved that its Object be either Personal, using the term "personal" in its broadest, least limited sense, or Super-personal. Whether the Super-personal is not a contradiction in terms—the Super-personal being the super-possible—I leave for you to cogitate. For my part I see no other reasonable conclusion than that this Somewhat experienced is Person—not a

Person, much less an Individual, but Pure Person—free from all the limitations which we find in ourselves and others as persons. What such Perfect Personality is, and how such Being is related to ourselves and to the world, involve problems requiring much thinking—problems which are stirred, if they are not settled, in the theological classroom.

How much this experience—or, if you choose, this faith—in One behind the veil of outer things has meant to humanity, no words can adequately describe. By it men have “subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness have been made strong.” Very poignant is the question: Can men keep up heart if they cease to believe in such a Being? Can they go on singing, striving, enduring, hoping, when “the Great Companion is dead”? Can man bear the strain of life without God? Will not his spirit be crushed under the weight of nature’s ills? Will not the light of joy and trust die out of his heart? George Romanes, true scientist, true man, voiced the natural results of the abandonment of theism, when, in his revolt from Christianity in 1876, he wrote: “And now in conclusion, I feel it is desirable to state that any antecedent

bias with regard to theism which I individually possess is unquestionably on the side of traditional beliefs. It is therefore with the utmost sorrow that I find myself compelled to accept the conclusions here worked out, and nothing would have induced me to publish them, save the strength of my conviction that it is the duty of every member of society to give his fellows the benefit of his labors, for whatever they may be worth. . . . I am not ashamed to confess that, with this virtual negation of God the universe to me has lost its soul of loveliness, and although from henceforth the precept to 'work while it is day' will doubtless gain intensified force from the terribly intensified meaning of the words that 'the night cometh when no man can work,' yet when at times I think, as think I must, of the appalling contrast between the hallowed glory of that creed which once was mine, and the lonely mystery of existence as now I find it—at such times I shall ever feel it impossible to avoid the sharpest pang of which my nature is capable."⁴ Romanes' recovery of his faith, which he achieved with perfect honesty and without surrendering anything of the scientific spirit, is

⁴ *A Candid Examination of Theism*, by Physicus; see Romanes' *Thoughts on Religion*.

surely one of the significant incidents in the history of modern science.

Yet, reassuring as the experience of God may be, we cannot be true to ourselves and cherish it at the expense of our mental and moral integrity. As has been well said: "No one wants to be a fool, even a blessed fool." I cannot agree with Professor James that we are justified in creating a God in order to meet our own needs and longings. That would mean to undermine the very foundations of the moral order and threaten to bring the whole social structure down about our ears. Unless this consciousness of God can be justified to our intelligence we cannot continue to hold it with either self-respect or abiding advantage.

That it can be so justified I think has been demonstrated throughout the history of Theism. In our own time none perhaps has done it with more of acumen and conclusiveness than Professor Howison.⁵ And yet for myself I must confess that it is the experience and not the proof that is primary and basal and that without the experience the proof would be of little avail. Not that the experience is itself irrational or nonrational. On the contrary, it is

⁵ See *The Limits of Evolution*; also *The Contribution of Professor Howison to Religious Thought* (J. W. Buckham), *The Harvard Theological Review*.

of the very essence of that personal, intuitive reason which furnishes the premises of all reasoning. Given this substantial *datum* of experience, of the same order as our consciousness of self and of others, the intellect, or discursive reason, has its part to play in interpreting, defending, and relating it to the rest of our knowledge. Yet the fundamental reliance is the experiential. And so I ask you to return once more to this experience of Something or Someone There and to consider with me the chief objections to its validity. For we cannot contentedly and securely maintain it so long as there are unanswered objections prodding us at every step.

IV

There are three possible objections that may be raised against the validity of this experience of God: first, that it is an illusion; second, that it is merely subjective; and, third, that it is a misconception. Let us take these up in turn.

1. If this is an illusion, there are three things that may be said of it: first, that it is a singularly persistent illusion—other illusions give way, this one perdures through the generations; second, that it is a singularly well-fortified illusion—capable, as has been said, of the most thorough and convincing rational explication and

defense—and third that it is a very widespread illusion, common to all races and peoples.

But though the experience is so widespread it must be admitted that many nevertheless do not have it. Why is this? Let us pause to consider this question a little before passing on to the other objections.

If one man says, "To me this Presence is real," and another says, "To me it is not," how shall we decide between them? It is easy to call the consciousness of God "temperamental" and so dispose of it with the arrow of an adjective. But the arrow is too light. Apply to the God-consciousness some fair tests. Can one come up to this experience again and again, for example, and find it real? Can other experiences be made to harmonize with it? If both these tests can be met, then comes the farther one: Can this man who says he hasn't it, have it? Has he it already, perhaps, in a form and degree different from the first? If not, which, if either, is abnormal? If God's presence is real to a large proportion of mankind and unreal to the rest, is the fact that he is unreal to a part proof that he is unreality? Is not the positive experience better evidence than the negative? Was Plotinus right when he said, "The One is not far away from anyone, and yet is liable to be far away from one and all,

since, present though It be, It is present only to such as are capable of receiving It, and are so disposed as to adapt themselves to It, and, as it were, to seize and touch It by their likeness to It?"⁶

It must be acknowledged that temperament plays a considerable part in realizing the presence of God. The mystical temperament constitutes a marked human type, although not every one who has such a temperament has the beatific vision. To possess such a temperament undoubtedly makes it easier to realize vividly the reality and nearness of God, but it is hardly the condition of such an experience. If it were, religion would be an esoteric cult and not the broad human experience that it is. Jesus did not say, "Blessed are they that have a religious temperament, for they shall see God." Let it be noted that differences in temperament, real as they are, are liable to exaggeration. Qualities and characteristics which are very marked in some individuals appear to be wholly lacking in others; but the lack may be in development, not in possession. Every individual has latent, undeveloped capacities of which he hardly dreams until some unwonted experience calls them out. To quote again Von Hügel: "In

⁶ *Enneads*, vi, ix, 4; quoted by Baron Von Hügel in *The Mystical Element of Religion*, ii, p. 92.

even the most purely contingent-seeming soul, and in its apparently but institutional and historical assents and acts, there ever is, there never can fail to be, *some*, however implicit, however slight, however intermittent, sense and experience of the Infinite."⁷

There is a fundamental like-mindedness of men which underlies all differences as the bed-rock underlies the varied soils, with their differing flowers and fruits. It is upon our like-mindedness far more than upon our differences that human society is founded. It is to this like-mindedness that the best literature, the noblest art, the soundest ethics, the deepest religion makes its appeal. There may be here and there an individual who does not respond to Hamlet, or the Sistine Madonna, or the Hallelujah Chorus, or the Golden Rule, or the twenty-third psalm; but if so, we count him either an undeveloped or an abnormal human.

Wide, confusing, baffling, as are the differences among men, in preference, in judgment, in belief, in everything, their agreements far exceed their divergencies. The life of humanity often seems but a seething sea of contrary winds and conflicting waves, but underneath all this

⁷ *The Mystical Element of Religion*, ii, p. 283.

surface disturbance are the untroubled deeps where great controlling, steadying convictions hold sway. And one of the deepest of these is the abiding assurance of God.

There is probably something of the mystic in everyone. Many a person who has thought himself a mere commonsense, everyday "tough-minded" practicalist has awakened one day to find himself strangely "tender-minded," to feel deep calling unto deep within him, a great wave of emotion overwhelming him, the breaking in upon him of a new light, or, as it has been put, the sudden opening of an unsuspected chamber in his soul. There are in all of us capacities that we have not fathomed. To deny to anyone the possibility of some form of mystical experience is unwarranted dogmatism. There is reason to assume that every man, speaking broadly, has enough of the mystical in him to realize the presence of God experientially. In that stirring passage in which Tertullian, who certainly could not be called an irrational mystic, calls upon the soul of man, "simple and rude, uncultured and untaught," to stand forth and declare itself concerning its experience of God, he declares, "Whenever the soul comes to itself as out of a surfeit, or a sleep, or a sickness, and attains something of its natural soundness, it speaks of God," and adds, "There is not a

soul of man that does not from the light that is in itself . . . proclaim God.”⁸

Yet still the “tough-minded” man is repelled. He feels compelled in honesty to say that this sense of the Presence of God seems to him an unreal, vapid, pathological experience. He neither has had it, nor expects to have it, nor cares to have it. It seems to him wholly out of place and useless in this rough, hard, work-a-day world. And his protest is worth attending to, for he too may be a son of Abraham. Let him ask himself, however, why he has such a *sense of the sacredness of Duty*? Is there not at the bottom of it a consciousness that in some way duty is linked with a God of duty?

2. As for the objection that the experience of God is subjective and by no means certifies any objective existence, it is true if “objective” is used in the literal sense. God is not an Object, but an Other, a personal Other. If it is meant to deny that there is such an Other corresponding to our personal prescience of Him, then the denial cuts through all our knowledge of the existence of persons. There can be no objective proof of the existence of a self. How can one know that he himself exists? Only by personal consciousness. How can he know that

⁸ *De Testimonio Animae*, chap. i; see R. M. Jones' *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 82.

other persons exist? By personal recognition. How can he know that God exists? Again, by personal knowledge. If this is subjective knowledge, then all knowledge of persons is subjective. Yet it is the most real of all knowledge. Well did Descartes start with the existence of himself, as the only thing he could not doubt. Not blindly did he pass to the existence of God as the next most certain truth. And thence to the existence of other persons. And yet, as we have now come to recognize, the existence both of other selves and of God was bound up in that primary truth of his own existence.

3. But suppose it be said, "Yes, this experience is real; there is, indeed, Something there; but what it really is is either the universe, the sense of the whole of things, or the totality of persons, or both, which gets itself before the mind as if it were some distinct and superior personal Reality."

What shall we say to this ever-recurrent and now so prevalent view? I can only offer here, and very briefly, these criticisms of it. First, it falsifies the plain implicates of consciousness, if it does not actually falsify consciousness itself. If, when one experiences, or believes he experiences, a Being self-existent and perfect, he is really experiencing a vast unconscious universe, or a company of selves like himself—

what confidence can be placed in the testimony of consciousness? A similar case might be made out regarding friendship. It might be said: The person whom you regard as your friend is not a self at all, but only an exudation of the universe. You are not loving a person at all, but a phenomenon, not a reality, but an appearance. What would be the best way to answer such an assertion? Would it not be by the expressive word which Professor James uses so aptly, "Bosh!"?

Not only does this assumption affront the integrity of experience; it fails, in the second place, to satisfy the needs and longings of the soul. In place of bread it offers a stone. I will not repeat here the overpressed but not inapt argument that the existence of a need assures its fulfillment, and that therefore there must be a God to correspond to our need; but I will suggest that the presence of moral rectitude and sympathy in ourselves points, at least, toward a Fontal Rectitude and Sympathy from whom it issues.

The final criticism that I have to offer of this monistic interpretation of the God-experience is that it raises more problems than it lays. For example, how could a material universe, inferior in nature to the perceiving person, get itself transformed in his consciousness into a

spiritual Self superior to himself? Or how could the aggregate of imperfect persons get itself incorporated in consciousness as a Unitary, Self-existent, All-perfect Person?

Thus we come, not without good reason, to trust the God-experience as meaning essentially what it seems to mean. That so many have found it to work is not a proof of its reality, but a strong indication of it.

Not that there are not immense and ubiquitous difficulties in clothing this experience in adequate and comprehensive ideas, in relating it to this "too, too solid flesh" and this often unintelligible world; but the difficulties are no greater than in making any hypothesis you may adopt fit this rebellious, recalcitrant frame of things with its obstinate encounters and its ever-escaping margins. Evidently, we were not intended to have an easy time of it here, either in our living or our thinking. Perhaps it is best so. Otherwise what use would there be for philosophy, say nothing of religion?

Into the question of whether this God-experience is individual or social I cannot here enter farther than to say that if it is, as I have treated it, individual, that by no means prevents its being social also. For *individual* and *social* are not—as we are coming to see—exclusive, but complementary.

This deep down, ineradicable experience of God, too deep to be fully understood, yet capable of convincing rational explication and defense, is the central factor in religion. Not that this is all of religion. From this root religion spreads far and wide, flowers and fruits abundantly and makes all the areas of our human life comely and glad. Religion thus becomes, as Professor Hocking has called it, "the residual inspiration of human life." By its effects we know it. It incites the arts and mothers the enthusiasms. It appears in moral character as "anticipated attainment." It refreshes, sustains, ennobles the soul. But beneath all its activities and manifestations lies this elemental experience of God, not always distinct, but becoming clearer and clearer through the double dialectic of life and thought until one finds in him the Person of persons.

It is a great thing for religion, as well as for the philosophy of religion, that there has come to us in these days of alternate confusion and clarification the full purport of this distinction between the experience of God and the idea or doctrine of God. Too long have ideas and doctrines of God been substituted for God himself. Hence have arisen skepticism, revolt, agnosticism, atheism, all of which have often been rejection of ideas of God rather than of God himself.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE¹

THE appeal to experience as the justification of religion is so strong that it might well be stronger. Its full strength cannot be revealed until it is subjected to the most thorough and critical examination. After the question: What is religious experience and how is it related to experience in general? comes the question: What is *Christian* experience and how is it related to racial religious experience? Until such questions as these are asked and answered many minds will refuse consent to a faith which comes to them clad only in its own native power, but without philosophic credentials. Only by a thorough critique of Christian experience can the convincing character of the claims of Christianity be disclosed.

I

The term "experience" is very loosely used to cover physical sensation, mental activity, and spiritual knowledge. We speak of experiencing bodily pleasure or pain, as if it were our very selves who were pleased by a taste or hurt by a blow. Yet, at the same time, we

¹ From *The Constructive Quarterly*, vol. v, No. 2, June, 1917.

know that it is our body that is affected rather than ourselves. Similarly, we speak with much more of a sense of closeness of identification—though it is noteworthy that here we do not customarily use the term “experience”—of understanding a mental proposition, as if we ourselves as personal intelligences recognized it as true (for example, a geometrical demonstration). Yet here again, upon more careful thought, we realize that it is the mind rather than the innermost self that is involved in such knowledge. For our reasoning faculties are in a sense only instrumental to our deeper self, as is implied in the familiar lines,

“A man convinced against his will
Is of the same opinion still.”

In religious experience, however, it is clear that the *very self* is involved far more completely and unreservedly than in either physical sensation or mental judgment. There is an authoritativeness, a sense of reality and of conscious self-commitment in religious experience which give to it a singularly central and sacred place in human life. Its intensity may be transitory, but it leaves a vivid impress of abiding reality.

This is true of religious experience wherever it is found, in a lesser degree in its lower and

more primitive forms, in a higher degree in its higher forms. Whatever its cause, there is a certain commanding and serious quality in religion, when it is genuine, which sets it apart from all other forms of experience as possessed of greater significance.

It must be granted that in some cases there is a revulsion from the intense consciousness of assurance of religious experience toward what sometimes comes to seem the more solid though skeptical reality of reason; but in such cases there is almost invariably a sense of loss, as if one had been compelled to drop to a lower level to gain reality. And often there remains a lurking conviction that reality may lie, after all, in the more ideal realm.

II

When we seek for the inner essence of religious experience we find ourselves confronted with such a multiplicity of beliefs, practices, and emotions that it seems hopeless to fasten upon any one as definitive. And yet when one goes below all these to their root one comes upon something, as we have seen, which, however elusive, however overlaid with corruptions, underlies all religion. It is what we call *spirit*, the supernatural, the divine. In its lower forms only a vague indefinite *mana*, in its

higher it rises into something worthy of the name of God. *Something or Someone* (either one or many) *beside oneself and other creatures and objects*—that is the consciousness that haunts the human mind and gives rise to what we term religion.

It is possible to explain this consciousness of a spiritual world as imaginary, marginal, unreliable. Certainly it is mystical in its nature; but its power over human life and its persistence do not readily admit of this explanation. It does not fade away as racial intelligence grows, but develops in strength and sanity. It not only allies itself to, but stimulates, a rational interpretation of the universe. The conviction arises that this religious experience is *in itself* rational, possessing a kind of elemental self-evidencing rationality that surpasses the bounds of ordinary reasoning. The basis of this conviction cannot here be examined. Suffice to say that, as intuitionism, it has strong support in the history of human thought.²

In the greater ethnic faiths this experience becomes theistic, ethical, spiritual. In Christianity it attains its purest and most vital form. Its manifest superiority has led us to

² For a further discussion of this subject see my *Mysticism and Modern Life*, chap. v.

look upon Christian experience as something quite by itself, original, new, unrelated; but a larger outlook convinces the student of religion that Christian experience, unique and supreme as it is, is not something apart and alone. Rather is Christianity the culmination and fulfillment of the religious experience of the race, *revealed*, to be sure, but as the climax of a progressive revelation.

As the highest form of the racial religious experience, Christian experience has a definite character and content, distinguishing though not separating it from the experiential content of other religions. Just what this "essence" of Christianity is has been the object of diligent quest.

Before endeavoring to define its content let us not fail to recognize that *Christian experience* itself has assumed quite different forms in various stages of its history. The Christians of the second and third centuries, emerging from Judaism or paganism and standing face to face with martyrdom, had an experience differing in many ways from that of the Christian of to-day. So with the Christians of the Middle Ages, living in a well-nigh spent civilization, and confronting a supposedly imminent end of the world. The Roman Catholic type of experience exhibits a marked contrast to the Prot-

estant. The evangelical and the liberal types of experience differ. It is hardly just to assert that one of these is right and all the rest wrong. To one brought up under the sway of evangelicalism it is quite natural to assume that his is the only genuine kind of experience; but he can hardly fail to recognize that the evangelical type is undergoing constant alteration. One kind of Christian experience may, it is true, be purer, higher, nearer to the heart of Christianity than others, but that does not prove that the others are false or fruitless. Each may grasp an aspect of the larger experience.

III

Is there, then, a *common* Christian experience which underlies and unites all of its forms, as one ocean fills many bays and inlets? If so, how shall we discover it? Not by merely going back to original Christianity, as Harnack would have us do; nor by taking it as a whole, in all the forms and phases of its development; nor by fixing upon the most highly developed form and making that the criterion. Rather, by seeking the underlying formative content common to all types of Christian experience and disentangling it as far as possible from the subordinate and temporal factors bound up with it.

Proceeding thus, we find that the common and constitutive root of Christian experience is *the bond uniting Christians to God through Christ*. It is his relation to Christ that makes the Christian a *Christian*.³ It is true that Christ may be conceived in very different ways. To one Christian the historic Jesus may be central; to another the conception of the indwelling, living Christ. One may find the lineaments of Christ blend and lose themselves in those of the Spirit, or the heavenly Father. To another they may be confused and obscured in that of the Church. Even so, these experiences—varying not only in clarity and potency but in truth and worth—may all of them, in differing degree, be infused and vitalized by the personality of Jesus Christ. In other words, the Christian experience is an experience of personal relationship to a personal Spirit through the medium of an incarnate revelation, however diversely that revelation may be mentally represented.

The Christian experience, centering thus in Christ, is a regenerative, *redemptive* experience. Whether this be chiefly through a sense of forgiveness of sin or of entrance into a larger, freer life, or both, whether it be sudden or

³ A very striking and beautiful expression of this truth is found at the beginning of the Second Epistle of Clement.

gradual, is secondary. *It is a new life.* The terms in which this new life is represented differ widely; that again may be but a testimony to its reality. It is true that this renewing power of Christian experience has often become weakened and impoverished. Rationalistic and naturalistic tendencies of thought have overshadowed it. Conventional forms of Christianity have at times reduced it to a mere sense of secured safety. Nevertheless, through the whole stream of Christian experience runs this sense of a life renewed—a life imparted by Love, at cost of the sacrificial suffering which love entails when sin has intervened.

Once more, the Christian experience is an idealizing, prophetic experience. It is characterized by the active pursuit of an ideal, individual and social. It is ever looking toward a goal. Something better on before, toward which men are to press, that is part of Christian experience. It is thus not only individual but social in its nature.

Here, again, there has been enormous diversity of ideas and programs. Heavenly homes, New Jerusalems, imminent millenniums, new social orders to be won by labors together with God—all imaginable forms of the kingdom of God—yet ever a *kingdom*, of one sort or another. For this is part of the

normal Christian experience; it looks for a better self and a better city. It is true that there have been periods in Christian life and thought when this spirit has been languid, when an alien temper of pessimism and stagnation has gained the ascendancy. But a faith, as an individual, should be judged neither by its lapses nor its self-contradictions, but by its ruling temper and spirit.

It is needless to add that genuine Christian experience is a profoundly and vitally *ethical* experience. Otherwise it would have had no stable and enduring quality.

Christian experience, then—if one may attempt to define what is too rich for definition—is an individually enlightening and regenerative, ethically purifying, socially redemptive experience of God through the historical-spiritual person *Jesus Christ*. It is thus both the interpretation and the fulfillment of racial religious experience.

IV

Compare this conception of Christian experience with older and more limited versions of it.

The common Protestant conception of the content of Christian experience goes back for its sanction into the beginnings of the evan-

gelical movement. Its prevalence is probably due more to John Wesley than to any other single individual. The strength of Wesleyanism lies in the fact that it sees Christianity to be an experience, not chiefly a belief or cult. The two essential elements of this experience are conceived to be conversion and sanctification. That which gives impulse and activity to both of these is the "testimony of the Spirit." The testimony of the Spirit is defined by Wesley as "an immediate impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God, that Jesus Christ has loved me and given himself for me, and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."

That is an admirable statement of the Christian faith, but consider for a moment how much it presupposes. First, that there is a God and that there is a soul—both of which, to the inquiring mind, are open to question and must be proved. It presupposes also a historic-spiritual person, Jesus Christ, who is of so exceptional a nature that he can know and love in all the ages each individual who turns to him. Then, too, it involves the reality of sin, that sin has power to alienate the soul from God, and that this alienation may be removed through the mediation of Christ.

All this, Wesley would say, is a matter of experience and rests upon the experimental basis. In the main this is true. Yet experience cannot establish historical fact, though it may witness to it. Nor can it of itself alone establish the doctrines here involved. The experience which Wesley calls "the testimony of the Spirit" is, evidently, not the simple, isolated and self-supported fact which he assumes it to be. Historical and intellectual factors are involved in it. It does not come to the Christian as a solitary individual. It is mediated by the Christian Community. It roots deep down in the primary religious impulse of the race. It is attached to a definite historic religion, which itself is closely related to an anterior faith, and that again to a great family of religions.

Moreover, the Wesleyan is only one—though one of the purest and most vital—of the types of Christian experience. The author of the Epistle of James did not define his experience in such terms; neither did Justin Martyr, nor Ignatius, nor Augustine, nor Saint Francis, nor Theresa, nor Luther, nor Calvin. Yet they all represent genuine varieties of Christian experience and all shared much that Wesley experienced and he much that each of them experienced. All of which clearly con-

firms the two truths we have already reached, (1) that Christian experience is far more inclusive and varied than we have been accustomed to regard it, and (2) that its forms and effects are largely molded by ideas or doctrines.

What, then, is the relation of *ideas* to experience in the realm of Christian faith? Do the ideas beget the experience or the experience the ideas? We have already taken the ground that the experience is primary and the ideas, or doctrines, secondary. This is further indicated by these two patent facts. First, Christian experience is manifestly far deeper and worthier than its doctrinal statement.⁴ To say this is not to reflect upon the doctrines, but to magnify the experience. The doctrines are essential and valuable interpretations of the experience, but they are inferior to it, as words are less than thoughts. Nor is it to exalt emotion. For to define experience as emotion is no more adequate than to define it as idea. Idea and emotion invariably attend experience—perhaps we should say are parts of it—but it is greater and deeper than they.

Again, not only is the Christian experience greater and deeper than Christian doctrine, but

⁴ "Christianity is based upon recorded experiences, which are eternally self-verifiable in the soul of the man who puts them to the test."—Professor B. W. Bacon, at the Modern Churchmen's Conference, England, 1920.

often the doctrines, especially as formulated by individuals, are plainly out of accord with the experience. How often we meet with Christians of an intense and profound experience, eager to present theories which (perhaps owing to a lack of intellectual training) are painfully short of or even contradictory to the experience which we can detect burning warm and true beneath the smoke which issues from it. Their ideas fail to represent their experience, and not seldom misrepresent it. The failure to recognize this discrepancy between idea and experience, doctrine and truth, has led to endless confusion and misunderstanding.

Once more Christian doctrines change more or less with changing social and intellectual environment. They cannot be detached from the total life and thought of the age.⁵ Experience changes too. Only, the latter has a far deeper continuity from age to age. The *like-mindedness* of men in all ages is a fact, in spite of their differences, but their *like-heartedness* is a still greater fact. Paul's doctrines, for example, appeal to us still, as embodying universal truths, however changed our environment; but Paul's experience is far nearer and dearer to us than are his doctrines.

⁵ Compare Francis J. McConnell, *Public Opinion and Theology*.

V

Experience first, doctrines second. That is the natural order. Only, there is no interval between; for as soon as experience begins, thinking begins, just as the shoot springs from the swelling seed. Christ first, then Christology; the new birth, then a doctrine of regeneration; the consciousness of forgiveness, then a doctrine of atonement; progress in holiness, then a doctrine of sanctification.

Yet doctrine, once formed, begins to color—shall we not say also to *arouse*?—experience. When a church has once become established doctrinal instruction begins as early as, sometimes even earlier than, the experience. In this way have come into existence types of Christian experience so wedded to certain doctrinal presuppositions—as, for example, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, and Liberal—and thus wearing so different aspects that they have hardly been able to recognize each other as Christian. And yet, granted the presence, in some if not all sects, of ideas and practices which can hardly be called less than corruptions, there is in each a residue of experience that is genuinely Christian. And upon the basis of this common experience, and the common body of doctrine arising from it, unity is made possible, *if only we are willing to go be-*

neath the surface to the experience underlying it.

The effect of doctrine upon experience is something to which the church should give careful attention. For doctrine may exercise either a restrictive and devitalizing or a releasing and stimulating influence upon experience. Experience should have room to expand and create new doctrinal forms and expressions. Otherwise, it either ferments or loses its vitality. A doctrine, or rather a doctrinal formulation, that to one generation is an aid to experience may to the next be an encumbrance.

For example, the experience of sin is one of the permanent factors of the religious consciousness, essential to the realization and progress of the religious life. As such it is peculiarly clear and poignant in Christianity—leading to certain doctrines which in evangelicalism have been extremely potent in arousing Christian experience, for example, to the doctrines of total depravity and everlasting punishment. Yet both of these doctrines do violence to another equally fundamental constituent of religious experience—the consciousness on the part of humanity of an honest endeavor to do right and of the consequent approval of God. Side by side these two ap-

parently hostile constituents of the religious experience—consciousness of worth and consciousness of sin—have dwelt together in our humanity, and even in the same breast. To be true to human experience both of them should be recognized. The theology which recognized human sin only, and ignored human goodness, for a long time held sway over the larger part of Protestantism, and wrought mightily, because it was true to one hemisphere of experience. Yet because it was an exaggeration, because it ignored a section of experience which should not have been ignored, for this among other causes it has now come about that the doctrine of sin has lost much of its hold upon our generation and the experience itself has been blunted by reaction.

Doctrine must be constantly squared with experience, or such results are sure to follow. The place of logic in theology must be subordinated to the deeper realities of experience. Then the interplay of the two will be normal and fruitful.

Take another illustration. The doctrine of Providence, one of the most characteristic yet difficult doctrines of Christian faith, is based upon experience of providential direction in one's own and in the general life. That experience has led to a doctrine of Providence

which attempts an indiscriminating application of the experience of individual divine guidance to the whole realm of humanity and nature. Hence arise insuperable difficulties. Obstinate facts emerge which refuse to yield to an easy and roseate doctrine of Providence. As a consequence a subtle distrust of the doctrine diffuses itself. The scientist raises his eyebrows; the Christian himself begins to wonder and doubt. The doctrinal instinct has overreached itself and constructed too soaring a doctrine, one which falls of its own weight. Thus the doctrine of Providence has, especially in the light of the Great War, come to seem to many a fabric of fancy. For example, a soldier wrote to his pastor from the battlefield: "This war makes one hate God . . . Omnipotent! and—he let it happen. Omniscient! He knew it in advance—and he's let it happen. I hate him . . . You have been kinder to me than God has been." What is the course to be taken? Is it not to go back to the base-line of experience and start over again, asking, "What is this experience? What does it involve as to the relation of God to my life and that of others?"—and then to study the facts and laws of history and science, as well as of experience, and thus to build up a doctrine of Providence which is true both to experience and to the

world in which we are living? The result may be very modest and incomplete, but it will at least be true to all the facts involved.

The relation of religious experience to cult is another subject which calls for more careful study. What is the influence of ritual in arousing and renewing individual experience? How far do common worship, the use of prayer and praise, rite and symbol, arise out of experience and promote it? And how far are they in danger of becoming substitutes for it? Here lies the key to cult as well as to doctrine.

Thus the return to experience, conceived in an ampler way than heretofore, as the source both of doctrine and cult, brings a fresh revelation of the fundamental nature of all religion, reveals the universality of Christianity as the interpretation and fulfillment of the religious life of humanity, and throws a flood of light on the nature and function of theology. Best of all, it reveals the basis and hope of a unified Christendom.

EXPERIENTIAL THEOLOGY¹

THOSE who dwell close to the banks of theology have for some time been aware of a rising flood. There is a warmer atmosphere and a more copious flow of forceful thought. The war may have checked this outflow; it has purified and refilled its sources. It is not so much a "reconstruction" of theology that we are witnessing as a *rebirth*—a new infusion of life, a fresh springtide. *The theology that is now manifesting itself is newer than the "New Theology" and older than the "Old Theology."* It is a theology that has put off the old man with his deeds—dogmatism, systemism, speculation, controversialism—and has put on the new man that after God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.

I

The chief characteristic of this regenerated theology is its *experiential* character. It is the theology of Christian experience.² This means an almost revolutionary change. Theology as a science takes its place as secondary

¹ From *The Methodist Review* (Quarterly) April, 1917.

² By experience, it is needless to repeat, is meant not empirical experience, but spiritual experience, in which the rational and ethical rather than the "feeling" element predominates.

and subordinate to a greater reality. It has become *ancilla religionis*. It has learned that its sphere is not to be ministered unto but to minister. It is to be henceforth the interpreter and servant of experience, commissioned not to lead but to follow, not to corral truth but to clarify it. "Theology is preceded by religion as botany by the life of plants," as one of the foremost to recognize and promote this change has said.³ Manifestly, this means a change in the whole spirit and attitude of theology. Henceforth she must take her pitcher to the living well and draw water from deeps of which she has not hitherto been fully aware. Beneath doctrines lies Truth; beneath understanding, Experience; beneath interpretation, Reality.

II

To base theology upon experience calls, however, for a conception of *experience* far wider and deeper than that which is ordinarily held. In many respects the very word "experience" is misleading. It is apt to suggest a mere superficial, passing *stimulus*—something that has to do with subjective feeling rather than with objective reality. Many weak, exaggerated, and irrational notions of religious experience have attached

³ William Newton Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology*, p. 1.

themselves to it and beclouded its true nature. It has been identified solely with the exotic phenomena of revivals. Abnormal forms of mysticism have become associated with it, lending it an atmosphere that has alienated many minds. Religious experience has too often meant only conventional conversion or spasmodic emotion.

Only of late have unprejudiced students of religion come to realize that these manifestations of religious experience are not to be taken as adequate indices of its true character. They are but outward and often lurid signs and accompaniments of a deeper reality, whose underlying nature is something that neither psychology nor metaphysics can explain or explain away. We are just beginning to appreciate the varied and comprehensive wealth of religious experience. Leibnitz had a religious experience as well as Luther, Wordsworth as well as Wesley, Emerson as well as Edwards, Edward Everett Hale as well as General Booth.

III

While religious experience is far too deep and vital a reality to be a mere intellectual process or attitude, it is nevertheless fundamentally and indubitably *rational*. For at the heart of religious experience is faith, and as Fries said, "Faith springs immediately from the very inner

essence of Reason.” Faith is the reach of the soul into the eternal verities. It is that by which we understand that the worlds were formed by the word of God. Its atmosphere is that of sanity and calm and sweet reasonableness.

It often seems quite otherwise. Clouds and darkness are not seldom round about religious experience—mental confusion, nervous excitement, sometimes even moral instability. Yet beneath all these disturbances there is an abiding calm of rational conviction. A person who has a religious experience *knows*, and knows that he knows. He may make sad work of defining his knowledge. He may make even sadder work, at times, of living it. Yet he knows that he has touched Something, or Someone, that is real, rational, abiding. The use of such phrases as the “Rock of Ages,” the “sure foundation,” “blessed assurance,” and the like, however crude, indicates this sense of having reached the foundation truths, the roots of rationality. Religious truth is rational because it is personal. The very precipitancy and dogmatic assurance with which the possessor of a Christian experience sometimes hastens to propound and defend an incongruous set of doctrines is evidence of the strength of a conviction far greater than the ability to formulate it.

But can truth be rational in essence unless it

is correct in explication? Certainly it can. One can grasp truth too great for him to understand, much less explain. The failure to realize this indicates that one has not yet gotten below the surface of truth and imagines that it consists in definitions, propositions, and demonstrations, not knowing that these are but its trappings and suits, and that there is that within that passeth show. One may seize with a firm and unrelaxing grasp an eternal and vital truth and yet be quite inconsequential in his understanding and interpretation of it, just as a scientist may gain possession of indubitable facts in nature and form a hypothesis regarding them which proves to be entirely untenable. A religiously awakened man may be "very sure of God" and yet propound and defend a theology as impossible as the Ptolemaic theory of the heavens. Yet because one holds the Ptolemaic theory we do not regard the sun as a myth. It is his theory of it that is at fault.

The inherent rationality of religious experience is revealed not only in the sense of conviction it begets, but in the strong impulse it gives to thinking as well as to action. It stimulates thought. It is true there is a type of religious experience that seems to stifle thought, that lives in mere feeling—rising and falling in temperature with the fluctuations of a mere emo-

tional caloric. This hectic, contagious sentiment sadly needs the corrective of disciplined thought. However inaccurate and blundering the thinking that arises from religious experience may be, it is essential to its life, and tends—unless it becomes divorced from experience—to self-correction and ever closer approximation to an adequate expression of the reality behind it. Moreover, the theory reacts upon the experience, aiding or hindering it by giving it either a normal or an abnormal expression, a free or a choked channel. Not only so, but theology helps to induce experience through the medium of ideas.

IV

If, then, theology flows normally and freely out of religious experience, if it is the means of the self-interpretation and an aid to the impartation of experience—that by which it relates itself to the thought-world—what are the natural forms which an experiential theology will take?

It is clear—is it not?—that the form of theology which lies *nearest to experience itself* is purest and best, that is, the simple, spontaneous theology which we hardly recognize to be such at all. This is the theology of insight. It expresses itself in clear and simple affirmations and aphorisms. It finds its most perfect embodiment in the teachings of Jesus.

It is not customary to think of Jesus as a theologian. In the sense in which we usually use the term he is not; and yet, in the truest sense, he is the greatest of theologians—partly for the reason that he does not appear to be one. As has more than once been said, glass is made not to be seen, but to be seen through. Jesus was so transparent a teacher that we see the truth through him, or, rather, in him, and forget that by his very transparency he shows himself the master theologian. The simplest truth is the greatest truth, in theology as elsewhere; and he is the greatest theologian who can make great truth simple and self-evident. We hesitate to call Jesus a theologian for the same reason that we hesitate to call Lincoln an orator; and yet as the Gettysburg Address is the purest of oratory, so the parable of the prodigal is the purest of theology.

Theology at the first remove, however, is not the only theology that is needed. Truth in its noble simplicity is most precious, as well as most convincing; but truth needs also to be formulated, correlated, organized—shall we not say *systematized*? Thus we find ourselves, in spite of ourselves, calling back from banishment that old-time offender, systematic theology. Can any one doubt that there is a place for systematic theology—provided it does not

become the victim of its own method and put system above truth? Surely there is a place for unity and order in the interpretation of religious experience. It can never be less than one of the great tasks of the human mind to endeavor to coordinate religious experience with other forms of experience. We cannot live an ordered and harmonious life until the truths of religion are adjusted to those of the outer world as well as to that complex of mental activity which makes up our inner microcosm.

V

Another kind of theology for which there will always be need, and toward which there is a natural impulse from Christian experience, is the theology of persuasion and defense, or *Apologetic*. Just as surely as one who has come into possession of a great and releasing experience, moved by the desire to impart it, seeks to induce another to share it, just so surely he finds himself formulating an Apologetic, a theology of rational persuasion. Questions and objections appear, and must be met. Such a theology arises as naturally and inevitably as the artist fulfills the impulse to put upon canvas the vision of beauty that invests his soul, or the poet to sing the song that fills his heart and will not let him be silent.

Apologetic theology has, it is true, often become mechanical, unconvincing and unpersuasive; but that is the fault of the artist, not of the art. Apologetic in the age of Justin, of Origen, and of Chrysostom was no perfunctory or fruitless task. Even in the days of Butler's *Analogy* and Schleiermacher's *Addresses* it proved itself more puissant than all the weapons of skepticism or the panoply of indifference. The power of Apologetic is not yet exhausted. It only needs the freshening and vitalizing of a new passion for truth.

Still another form of theology, *Speculative theology*, flows freely from the fountain of Christian experience. Speculation—for some minds at least—is the natural overflow of the upwelling spring of the religious life. Through it the eager mind gains scope and play and enlargement. Never was the speculative instinct more exuberant and untrammelled than in the patristic age. Here is, as it were, the playground of theology. Men like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine were like minds that have been suddenly given wings and found themselves afloat in the boundless and sustaining atmosphere of the divine freedom and love. Should they not fly at will—here, there, everywhere—unrestrained and without too great regard for consequence and

consistency? Nor have they lacked successors through all the centuries. The abuse of the speculative impulse has indeed been great, but abuse never justifies permanent disuse.

In these gray, pragmatic days the speculative instinct has been crushed. The boundaries of speculation have been fenced with caution; and wisely so. For speculation had been guilty of assumptions and vagaries by means of which the verities became confused with the possibilities, and steady values with fluctuating theories. And yet there is a place, and always will be, for speculation in the realm of religious truth. Even science, with all her magnifying of exactness and precaution, has of late indulged in quite as free speculation as that for which she has too freely condemned theology. In each field speculation has its place. Only let us beware not to mistake speculation about truth for essential truth.

VI

Thus the theology of experience gives us back the fundamental forms of theology, only with a new spirit, a clear guiding principle, and a hitherto unregarded criterion of values. Instead of the lifeless and repressive theology which has created so strong a reaction, with its dogmatism, its systemism, and its unanchored speculation,

we are gaining a theology grounded in self-evidencing truth-experience—personal, intuitional, spiritual—which from this underlying experience proceeds reverently and freely to the essential task of interpretation and organization.

Experiential theology, then—let it be said once more—is, in the best sense, also rational theology, though at the opposite pole from rationalism. It is no theology of tongues, though inspired by the same Spirit whence issues the gift of tongues. It does not, as Paul did not, despise tongues. On the contrary, theology has learned, somewhat, how to understand tongues and to interpret. Yet it would rather prophesy. Of prophecy without the Spirit, however, it has learned to be cautious. That way impotence and dry-rot lie. When the Spirit speaks it would speak, and in terms as rational as they are spiritual; and when the Spirit is silent it would be silent.

A theology of this order wins respect upon all sides. It does not affront philosophy, for philosophy itself is slowly coming to recognize the inadequacy of mere intellectualism. It does not antagonize science, for its realm is other than that of science, though contiguous to it. It does not offend the childlike soul, for itself has the childlike spirit; yet it wins the thoughtful mind, for it seeks to give a reason for its faith.

CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE RELIGIONS¹

THE interpretation of Christianity as experience helps greatly toward an understanding of its place among the religions. The roots of Christianity have never been thoroughly explored. Only in recent years, indeed, has Christianity been thought of as having roots, or as being a plant, a growth, at all. Rather has it been looked upon as a *donum Dei*, a supernatural deposit, a treasury of knowledge and beatitude delivered incomparable and complete to mankind. For the better part of two millenniums this conception prevailed. Now and again, however, the cunning eye of scientific criticism, trained in the laws of a universe inconsonant with this assumption, saw through its meagerness and caught glimpses of a wider relationship and a deeper meaning.

I

The impossibility of a completely segregated, independent, and purely supernatural religion has become increasingly evident. Even from the first the dependence of Christianity upon Judaism was so clear that the two Testaments

¹ From *The Hibbert Journal*, vol. vii, No. 3, April, 1909.

were incorporated as complementary parts of a single revelation; but that left the revelation still static, unrelated, isolated.

It meant the coming of a great change when the discovery was made that other kindred religions, notably the Babylonian, disclose ideas, practices, legends, strikingly similar to those of Israel, suggesting a common origin. Likewise was the assurance of the older Apologetic disturbed by the accumulating testimony of historical scholarship to the large place which Hellenism has had in the development of Christianity. It was not merely an "influence of Greek ideas upon the Church," as Edwin Hatch termed it in his Hibbert Lectures; it was a mighty current of idea and impulse that poured into Christianity from Greek Philosophy and mingled its waters with the earlier fount from Sion's hill and the fresh pellucid stream from the hillsides of Galilee. "The influx of Hellenism, of the Greek spirit, and the union of the gospel with it," says Harnack, "form the greatest fact in the history of the church in the second century; and when the fact was once established as a foundation, it continued through the following centuries."² Earlier even than this, in the Pauline and Johannean theologies, the molding power of the Greek

² *What is Christianity?* Second ed., p. 214.

mind had begun to make itself felt in Christianity. And who can doubt that the Christianity of to-day, on its intellectual side, carries the permanent impress of the Greek mind? It is significant that so many of our church buildings are in the form (more or less) of the Greek temple.

Yet Judaism and Hellenism are far from exhausting the indebtedness of Christianity to other religions. That life-and-death conflict between good and evil—the good God and the righteous man pitted against the forces of darkness and falsehood—which absorbed the soul of the ancient Persians, may have made over to Christianity, chiefly through the Persian-Jewish contact in Babylon, something of its virile sense of powers to be overcome and wrongs to be overthrown, which has quickened the Christian spirit and moved it to greater earnestness in the battle with sin. The strength of the Christian belief in a future life and in the Fravashis, the spirits whose faces always behold the face of God—does it not come in part from that firm-knit faith that nerved the souls of the followers of Zarathustra?³

³ "Before the Exile the Jewish creed was very dim indeed as to resurrection, immortality, future judgment, and all we hold most dear. . . . The Irano-Vedic lore developed in Iran the first definite form of our ideas as to the future state, according to the obvious data in the case."—Dr. Lawrence H. Mills, *Zarathustra, Philo, the Archemenids, and Israel*, p. 208. It should be added that Professor James Hope Moulton did not recognize any considerable influence of Persian upon Jewish theology. See his *The Treasure of the Magi*, chap. iv.

Modern Christianity is characterized by a devoted loyalty to the home—"the Christian home" we often call it, knowing how closely it is associated with that elevation of woman which everywhere follows the footsteps of the evangel. Whence did Christianity acquire this devotion to the home? Hardly from the Orient alone. Jesus deeply sanctioned monogamy, and enforced the principles upon which alone the home can be built; but it was only with the advent of the Teutonic peoples into the family of Christianity, with that sacred fostering of the home life which was their especial virtue, that the home came to occupy the place of peculiar honor and sanctity which it now holds in our Christian heritage.

Without attempting a summary of all the contributions, religious and ethical, which Christianity has received from sources outside its own immediate content, it is becoming increasingly clear that, both in origin and in development, it has drawn largely from the best religious thought and life of the race. The two deepest strata of the religious life of humanity, Semitism and Aryanism, have given of their richest ores to Christianity. When we say that Jesus was a Jew, and that upon the best religious inheritance and instruction of his people and age he constructed his faith, we may

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not forget that this heritage of his reached far back of Hebraism, back of Jacob and of Abraham, back to that primitive and shadowy realm of human origins in which there first sprang up the idea that there are gods at all and that a tie of some sort unites the individual man to his tribal god and to his tribal brother. Out of the Semite the Hebrew, out of the Hebrew the Jew, out of the Jew the Christian. And who shall say how much the Christian of to-day owes to that savage, remote Semite, struggling out of his animalism towards a dawning light within?

In the same way, when we say that Hellenism furnished a large part of the intellectual conceptions out of which Christian theology was formed, we may not justly leave out of account the *antecedents* of Hellenism. For Hellenism did not begin complete, any more than Athene sprang full-armed from the head of Zeus. Far down in the early aspirations and outreachings of the mind of the Aryan race, before its migrations from the steppes of Southern Russia, were germinating those rational unifying conceptions which the new religion of Jesus caught and consecrated to its urgent ends. Out of Aryanism Hellenism, out of Hellenism Platonism, out of Platonism Alexandrianism, out of Alexandrianism, reaching down to the present day, the New Theology.

Neither royal family of Europe nor self-made man of America can deny relationship with the savage man and the ancestral ape. Nor can Christianity ignore its kinship with religion in its lowest and crudest beginnings. What then? Is it degraded by the relationship, polluted by the superstitious crudities of religion's earliest awakening? Rather does it by this kinship gain touch with total humanity in its upward striving, added sense of the greatness of the instinct which out of such chaos and meanness can produce such harmony and grace—as the water-lily, with its roots in the slime of the lake-bottom, blooms snow-white and fragrant in the summer sun.

II

The study of Comparative Religion is revealing Christianity in a wholly new light, from the vantage ground of a fresh viewpoint. For the first time we are getting perspective. In two ways the gain is inestimable. Comparison is disclosing the inherent strength and superiority of Christianity as it could appear in no other way. All values are clarified by comparison. The great Kohinoor, placed beside lesser diamonds, does not render them worthless, but only thus does its own resplendence appear. When the birds are caroling their gayest, and

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suddenly the song of the hermit-thrush rises above the roundelay, soulful, wistful, masterful, one perceives to what wealth and height of expression a bird-song can attain. It is only when Jesus moves across the field of vision where other men have walked that we know what a man can be. Other religions do not lose when placed beside Christianity, except relatively, but Christianity gains. There is at once a clearer understanding, both of them and of itself. The presence of the best reveals in the same instant the goodness of the good and the supremacy of the best. It was the folly of unfaith to hesitate so long to place Christianity upon a common base level with other religions, fully, freely, and without prejudice. For only as it stands on the same level can its true height be seen. The Parliament of Religions, though it cost many of us a pang of dismay at the time, was one of the greatest furtherances of Christianity that the friends of true religion ever accomplished.

The supremacy of Christianity appears by comparison, both in what it includes and in what it excludes. All that is worthiest and highest in other religions proves by comparison to be in Christianity. Is it the reverence of Hebraism, the freedom of Hellenism, the moral earnestness of Zoroastrianism, the mysticism of

Brahmanism, the sacrificial spirit of Buddhism? All are here in Christianity, and here, not in excess of emphasis, but in full and balanced harmony. And in much, too, that is in other religions and not in Christianity, its supremacy may be seen quite as clearly. Angles of distortion, ignoble and limiting ideas of God, asceticisms that wrong humanity, conceptions of nature and spirit that fetter and retard the spirit—how free on the whole from these defects of other religions is Christianity! Not that such excrescences have not become attached to Christianity and worked serious ill, but they do not belong to its spirit and essence.

We must not, however, suffer this broader outlook upon religion as a whole to blind our eyes to the true character of Christianity, lest we rob it of its own individuality. The fact that Christianity conjoined Hebraism and Hellenism by no means reduces it to a mere syncretism. Nor does the fact that it has incorporated elements from other religions make it an eclecticism. No one who understands Christianity would hesitate to say that it is far more than a union of Hebrew and Greek elements. Whatever Christianity has taken up it has assimilated. This is its secret—a marvelous *power of assimilation*. With that astonishing alchemy which indicates originality of

organism, Christianity has made its own, transformed, renewed whatever it has laid hold upon. Syncretisms combine, eclecticisms choose and construct, but only *life* assimilates. Explain it as you may, there is something in Christianity that enabled it to take Hebrew piety and Greek thought, and transform, vitalize, adapt each to its own nature and ends, so that it goes forth not wearing them as garments but incarnating them as life. It is only an inherently puissant and vital faith that can be receptive without becoming amorphous and demoralized. One has but to contrast Christianity and its power of assimilative receptivity with the later religion of ancient Rome and its heterogeneous confusion of incongruous faiths, to recognize that the difference is no less than that between life and death.

When we come to ask for the secret of this assimilative power we find ourselves approaching the problem which has proved so fascinating of late: What is the essence of Christianity? Where is the hiding of its power? It is not difficult, by analyzing Christianity, as Harnack has done, to discover certain potent fundamental truths—the Fatherhood of God, the worth of the soul, the kingdom of God—which, at least in their emphasis and fervor, are distinctively and characteristically Christian. But, after all,

close as these truths lie to the heart of Christianity, they are not its inner essence. Our New Theology is in great part characterized by its showing that Christianity won its way by uniting two great truths concerning God which no other religious philosophy has harmonized—Transcendence and Immanence. Yet no one would think of finding even in that synthesis, important as it is, the essence of the Christian religion. The ethics of Christianity too, and even its cult, reflect a simplicity and sincerity which help to account for the strong hold which Christianity secured and kept over the human mind; but none of these things solve the problem of its essence. To reach that, one must go deeper into that profound and subtle realm that holds the hidden springs of all that moves us most—*personality*. At the very source and center of Christianity there glows a Person who—say what we may of the incompleteness of his life-story and the later misconceptions which have obscured his true character—is the most compelling, transforming Fact in human history. The “incomparable significance of this personality as a force still working in history,” says Harnack⁴—“*this* is the real essence of Christianity.” “When God and everything that is sacred threaten to disappear in dark-

⁴ *Christianity and History*, p. 44.

ness, or our doom is pronounced, when the mighty forces of inexorable nature seem to overwhelm us and the bounds of good and evil to dissolve, when, weak and weary, we despair of finding God at all in this dismal world—it is then that the personality of Christ may save us. Here we have a life that was lived wholly in the fear of God—resolute, unselfish, pure; here there glows and flashes a grandeur, a love which draws us to itself.”⁵ Making the largest possible allowance for idealization in the portrait of Jesus in the gospels, there remains, as a necessary basis for it, a personality so strong, so pure, so noble, as to leave an indelible impress upon the human mind, which “far from fading, rather grows,” and gives promise of growing till it shall remold humanity into its likeness. “We needs must love the highest when we see it,” and, loving it, grow like it. Only let Jesus Christ be kept before humanity long enough and clearly enough, and he will make it over into his own image.⁶

⁵ P. 47.

⁶ The supremacy of Jesus in the eyes of others than Christians is well illustrated in the generous words of an orthodox Hindu to his fellow Hindus: “How can we be blind to the greatness, the unrivaled splendor of Jesus Christ? Behind the British Empire and all European powers lies the single great Personality—the greatest of all known to us—of Jesus Christ. He lives in Europe and America, in Asia and Africa, as King and Guide and Teacher. He lives in our midst. He seeks to revive religion in India. We owe everything, even this deep yearning toward our own ancient Hinduism, to Christianity.” See J. P. Jones, D.D., *India's Problem*, p. 357.

But is not Jesus himself also a product of evolution? Yes, in a sense Jesus certainly was a racial religious product. Generations of spiritual culture entered into his individuality. He was the consummate flower blooming on the most vigorous branch that had put forth from the religious trunk of humanity. And yet that does not explain him wholly; it does not touch the deepest secret of his being. That transcendent Self within him which rose above the physical, the temporal, the racial, which met and mastered limitation and circumstance, and all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and turned all into splendid victory—how shall we account for that? It cannot be accounted for, save as one sees in him another self beside the merely racial man—the Second Man from heaven. Not that this twofold selfhood is peculiar to Jesus Christ—it belongs to man as man—but that the eternal Self, which in us is but inconstant and indistinct, in him was so full-orbed and supreme that of him, as of no other, the author of the Fourth Gospel could write: “And the Word became flesh.”

III

The conviction is gaining ground that the hour has struck for a universal human religion, that the advance of humanity, as a whole, re-

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quires that mankind move henceforth under one spiritual leadership toward a common goal. Christianity is the only religion that can possibly fulfill this office. In the light of the study of comparative religion, it seems an extreme, almost a fanatical aim, to advance Christianity as entitled to supersede all other faiths; and yet it is only in the light of such a study that this aim gets its highest encouragement.

A sufficient reason—whether there be others or not—for pressing Christianity as the only religion fit to become the world's religion is that the others—to put it squarely, and I think fairly—have failed. Buddhism, Confucianism, Mohammedanism, with the minor religions, have all failed. Not that they have failed in the sense of not holding their own outwardly, and even making gains, nor in the sense of not containing a great deal of truth, and of accomplishing great good—but in the sense of not having done for their adherents and for humanity what religion ought to do. Not that Christianity itself has been absolutely successful; far enough from that. But Christianity has, at least, not failed. In spite of serious deficiencies and limitations on the part of Christians, Christianity has, by comparison, accomplished vastly more for human progress than any other of the world's faiths. And not

only by its works does Christianity make itself known, but also, and supremely, by that inherent, essential superiority which manifests itself to the eye of unprejudiced and pure rational judgment, discerning the things that are excellent.

In nothing is the true supremacy of the Christian Faith better attested than in the inner regeneration which takes place in other faiths when Christianity comes into close contact with them. This is the most remarkable religious fact, perhaps, in the life of the Orient to-day. Buddhism in India, in China, and in Japan is undergoing a marked purification in the direction of Christian ideals. Mohammedanism itself is becoming leavened with Christian principles to an extent but little understood. A Hindu, writing for *The Hibbert Journal*, has said of Christianity that "it has quickened Hinduism with a new, full life, the full fruition of which is not yet."

Why not, then, be content with this result? Why not let Christianity do its work indirectly, and depend upon these rooted religions to develop into a purity and power sufficient for the needs of their own races? The answer is that these religions, in spite of temporary resuscitation, are effete, and have not the power of development and adaptation; they lack the

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moral and spiritual vigor and resources to meet the multiplying demands of advancing humanity. It is the old parable of the new wine and the old wine-skins.

But, granted the need of a universal religion, and that none of the Oriental religions is able to meet the need, why should it be any individual religion, and not, rather, a new and greater religion made up of the best in all the religions, a religion of religions, a splendid hybrid obtained by what has been termed the "cross-fertilization of religions"? At first blush there is a certain fascination in this idea. It has an air of breadth and cosmopolitanism that gives it glitter, but it soon fades. It is seen that a religion which is coldly compounded of various religions, which is everything in general and nothing in particular, is no religion at all. To disdain a particular religion in favor of Religion is, as Dr. Oman has said, like objecting to being born because one cannot be *man*, but must be some particular man. The dream of a polyglot religion is evaporating. What humanity needs and will demand is a religion with a character of its own and a history of its own, a religion whose roots have gone down deep into the soil of many generations, which has grown up in its own strength and with a sense of its own mission, against

which storms have beaten and suns have burned in vain, and which has stood the test of time and transplanting, and changing civilizations. A religion which has thus sufficient might of its own, and yet sufficient real breadth and inclusiveness to absorb and conserve the truth of other religions, is far better fitted to become the religion of mankind than any syncretism or eclecticism.

IV

If Christianity is to be set forward as a world-religion, a faith for universal humanity, its adherents must strike away all the shackles that bind it, all the cumbersome, adventitious nonessentials that have become attached to it, and restore to it the freedom of its qualities, the strength, and simplicity of its original unobscured vision and unencumbered power.⁷ Too many intelligent men of our own time, who have never looked for the essence of Christianity, have identified it with dogmas and forms which really have no more to do with real Christianity than clothing has to do with

⁷ "I must again express my belief that, before Christianity is to gain acceptance by the people of India, it must be dissociated from many Western ideas and practices which seem to us essential even to its very life."—Dr. J. P. Jones, *India's Problem*, p. 356.

the man. Whatever any school of Christians may protest as to the infidelity of refusing to identify Christianity with a miraculous revelation, or an infallible Bible, of predestination, or substitutionary atonement, or eternal punishment, it is inexcusable for an educated person to be blind to the fact that these doctrines never were, nor can be, a part of essential Christianity. The Christian faith has won its way sometimes with the aid of these doctrines, sometimes in spite of them, but never because of them. Christianity is a religion of rational freedom, and if it has too often been forced to assume the form of a religion of external authority, the result can only be a transient travesty of its true character, certain in time to be cast aside.

And not only must Christianity be divested of its *impedimenta* if it is to make conquest of the world; there must be restored to it also that genius of adaptation to varied human need and environment which enabled it to break the bonds of Judaism and respond to the unconscious call of the Gentile world. This inexhaustible adaptability, this power of lending itself to the deeper needs of varied races without losing its own character and individuality, is, I repeat, characteristic of Christianity. It can come only from a character so

richly human that it speaks to the spirit of man as man. No other religion has shown a power of adaptation comparable with this. Who would have dreamed, at the outset, that Christianity could ever have found its most congenial home and development in the Teutonic race? Itself Oriental in origin and setting, why should it ever have won the Occident, save that it belongs to man as man?—so large and human in its resources that nothing else can vie with it in its appeal to a discerning and developing race.

It is a natural blunder to imagine that we of the West have made Christianity exclusively our own, explored it, exhausted it, stamped upon it its final form. We carry it back to the Orient as if it were our gift to the peoples that gave it birth. In a sense it is, in another sense it is their gift to us. Already Christianity is escaping our hands to do its own great work in its own way. The day of the missionary, noble as it has been and is, already draws toward its close. Vitalized and vitalizing Christian churches and civilizations are rising with firm but not ungrateful insistence to claim the right to develop in their own way. Again the herald of the Coming One is forced to proclaim with mingled sadness and joy, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

V

The result of placing Christianity among the religions, of subjecting it to a free and impartial comparison with other faiths, is thus twofold. In the first place, its kinship with other religions is proved. The religious development of the race is one, culminating in Christianity. The Christian faith has drawn up into itself and assimilated the highest ideas and aspirations of mankind. The life-blood of the religion of humanity flows in its veins; its victories are the fruitage, in part, of all the spiritual struggles of the race from its infancy. In the second place, such a comparison reveals the inherent supremacy of Christianity, its historical uniqueness, the vitalizing personality of its Christ, its unparalleled power of adaptation and development, thus laying upon it, with increasing urgency, the divine obligation of universality.

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IN the ratified, though yet unwritten, treaty of peace which has closed what we may now haply term the "late unpleasantness" between science and theology, at least two articles of supreme value are guaranteed. The first is that providing for the complete recognition of natural science. All truth is sacred, all forms of truth-seeking are holy.

Equally evident and final is this other article—the indispensability of theology. When the extreme of foolish word has been spoken about the uselessness of theology, when the utmost effort has been made to snub or to stamp it out of existence, suddenly it springs again where we should least expect it, in the very precincts of science. Not more pronounced was the disposition of the old-time theologian to invade science than is that of the present-day scientist to invade theology. The comprehensive scientist cannot easily resist the temptation to carry his thinking over into the realm of theology. Completeness of thought requires it. Thereby he pays theology the greatest tribute possible—the recognition of its

¹ Inaugural Address, Pacific School of Religion.

indispensability. A very considerable and able company are these scientist-theologians of our time, and gladly does the theologian welcome them to a share in his problems—large enough, surely, to go around—only asking for himself a like freedom when he ventures across the boundary line of science in search of that in whose pursuit we may rightly leap all barriers and ignore all boundaries—Truth.

II

Among the discoveries of natural science which inevitably lead the theologian to science and the scientist to theology the most revolutionary and reconstructive is evolution. The religious implicates of evolution cannot be ignored by either theologian or scientist. They have long clamored for settlement, at one time threatening disruption and anarchy, at another promising profounder solution and a diviner order. For many years evolution has been at once the hope and the despair of theology, now vainly denounced and resisted, now profusely welcomed and given the keys to the whole domain of religious thought. But the earlier agitation has passed. The storm has settled into calm. Hostility and dismay have disappeared. The time has come when, without heat or prejudice, in an atmosphere no longer

surcharged with the *odium theologicum* and the scientific scorn which it provoked, in the clear light of perspective, the student of theology may calmly and hopefully face the task of estimating the real values and deficiencies of evolution as a purveyor to theology.

III

It will lend concreteness and interest to our enterprise if we can select some single statement of evolution theology, that can be rightly regarded as representative, upon which to concentrate our thought. Fortunately, we are able to find such a statement ready at hand. Among those who have attempted to outline or to construct an evolution theology there is one who is justly preeminent, both as regards personal character and distinction and the value and success of his work. I refer to the eminent scientist, the ideal teacher, Joseph Le Conte. It is already clear that the name of Joseph Le Conte is to grow more and more luminous and his works are to follow him with the increasing influence of an assured reputation. Of the present scientific standing of Professor Le Conte's *Evolution and Its Relation to Religious Thought* I do not pretend to speak, but of its very great influence in clarifying and popularizing evolution and in commending it to reli-

gious minds there can be no question. A book written at the suggestion of Henry Ward Beecher which won the approval, on the side of science, of Professor Romanes, and on that of religion of Bishop Gore, has sufficient external commendation. But, far more than that, it has the almost unique distinction of combining a thoroughly comprehensible interpretation of evolution and a clear, free, and at times profound, treatise on theology. Here, if anywhere, theology and evolution have been reconciled. Scientific ardor, religious enthusiasm, clearness and comprehensiveness of thought, and lucidity of expression unite to give this volume voice and wings, and it has flown far and found wide and warm acceptance. To this teacher and to this book let us turn, then, for a representative presentation of the theological implications of evolution. A word or two further concerning the author and his peculiar preparation to act the part of mediator between Christianity and science. Reared in a devout home, undergoing during his college course an experience which he describes as "a very great crisis in my life," in which "life took on a new and glorious significance," an earnest church member, cultured in the Bible, in literature, and to some extent in philosophy, educated in medicine as well as in science, deeply in sympathy with the widest

humanistic interests of his time, Joseph Le Conte was most remarkably fitted—one might almost say predestined—to fill the role of mediation in the greatest intellectual controversy of last century. He himself felt most deeply this commission. In the closing words of his autobiography Professor Le Conte speaks of himself as “the pioneer in the reaction against the materialistic and irreligious implication of the doctrine of evolution,” and gives expression to his satisfaction in preaching this gospel, as he ventures to call it, “of glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all peoples.”

It would be strange indeed if this earnest conviction of a message, this striking volume, this great scientific discovery which lay back of it, meant nothing of worth to Christian theology; it would be equally strange if it meant the complete subversion of the great truths by which men have lived and wrought righteousness and subdued kingdoms before the discovery. But, now to our difficult task of estimation and criticism. First, then, let us seek to delimitate the values of evolution theology, and then, so far as we may, to point out its defects.

IV

The first and perhaps the greatest religious implicate of evolution is the truth of the Divine

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Immanence. The conception of the Absentee God of deism, with all the theological anthropomorphism and all the religious frigidity which accompanied it, evolution has made impossible in the future. It is difficult to overestimate the value of this result. We shall have no more forever the idea of a "carpenter God," an anthropomorphic God, one whom men think they can localize, externalize, placate, bargain with, and inwardly despise. Professor Le Conte's uncompromising alternative must be accepted: "The issue (let us look it squarely in the face) is: Either God is far more closely related with nature, and operates it in a more direct way than we have recently been accustomed to think, or else (mark the alternative) nature operates itself and needs no God at all. There is no middle ground tenable."² Many evolutionists have accepted the latter alternative, giving to evolution that materialistic interpretation which Professor Le Conte so earnestly renounces and so ably refutes. For himself, he saw the truer meaning and found God in every step and process of evolution.

It would be a shortsighted exaggeration to attribute the discovery of the truth of the Divine Immanence to evolution. It is as old as the Psalm-book, as Greek philosophy, as

² *Evolution and Its Relation to Religious Thought*, p. 297, second edition.

Hinduism. The early Christian fathers were filled with it. But it was largely lost under the schemes and systems of a later theology. Theistic evolution has rediscovered for us the truth of God's nearness to nature and set it where it can never again be lost. This means no less than the recovery of nature to the uses of the religious life. It is the vindication of the psalmist, the nature-lover, the poet, who have ever found God in the light of setting suns, in star and bird and flower, and in all the wondrous life and beauty of nature. If the consciousness of the Divine Presence has wrought itself afresh into our modern theology, our literature, our education, our daily contact with nature, imparting a new faith and joy and peace to life, let us not forget that the law of evolution, as interpreted by such men as Joseph Le Conte and Nathaniel Shaler, Henry Ward Beecher and Lyman Abbott, Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning, has opened the way for this larger, deeper conception of God in his world. For the Divine Immanence is at last only an aspect and expression of the Divine Love.

V

To supplement this truth of the Divine Immanence evolution has furnished also a posi-

tive contribution to theism in unfolding the unity and teleology of the universe. Evolution indicates that "through the ages one increasing purpose runs."

Here is signal confirmation of the evidence of design. "It has been said, it is continually being said, that evolution has destroyed forever the teleological view of nature—that is, the idea of design in nature. Yes, if we mean the manlike, cabinetmaking, watchmaking design of Paley, and older writers—a separate petty design for each separate object. It has indeed destroyed this, but only to replace it by a far nobler conception—a truly godlike design, a design embracing all space, and running through all time, including and absorbing all possible separate designs, and predetermining them by a universal law of evolution."³ It is impossible to overestimate the scope and splendor of this new teleology. "The process of evolution," says John Fiske, "is itself the working out of a mighty teleology, of which our finite understandings can fathom but the scantiest rudiments."⁴ If evolution has taken away special design, it has given us in place of it cosmic design.

³ *Evolution and Its Relation to Religious Thought*, p. 357.

⁴ *Cosmic Philosophy*, vol. ii, p. 406, quoted by James Seth in *Ethical Principles*, p. 431.

VI

Another very valuable asset has come to us through evolution in the vast enlargement and enrichment of the conception of progress. It is true that the law of growth, of unfolding—the larger law which should be termed Development, of which evolution is but a segment—was recognized almost as early as man began to think. Aristotle gave it scientific statement. Jesus Christ dwelt upon it with profound emphasis and wrought it into the very structure of his lifework. No other, in any age, philosopher, teacher, scientist, has ever approached Jesus in insight into this divine law of development and absolute confidence in its results. Unto it he intrusted with unwavering certainty the seed of his Kingdom. And the result justified his faith. No age, no generation has entirely missed the vision of this law of progress. And yet no generation has ever had the full effulgence of it until our own. And evolution, all unwittingly, but not unguided, has been the means of opening its splendor to our view.

Through the doorway of scientific evolution we have passed into a new and larger world, wherein the law of progress is seen to have not only cosmic scope, but universal human significance. In the light of development history takes on a new meaning. Law, literature,

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science, social science, theology—all are reborn. Life itself is transfigured. All things fall into harmony. Eternal hope springs in the heart of humanity. The man who has not felt the music of the law of eternal progress in his soul is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils. He alone will hope to frustrate the Divine order. He is blind to the Divine revelation that has been made to his age. Nor is this law of progression limited in its horizon to the present world. As Professor Le Conte so earnestly argues, it has promise for the life that now is and for that which is to come.

Coming as it has with such noble and resplendent truths to rebuke narrow views, to overturn errors, to enlarge our thought of God and nature, it is no wonder that to Professor Le Conte, and many another, evolution seemed wholly revolutionary and reforming—a new orb, in whose light old things are passed away and all things become new. But perspective, which reduces all things to their true proportion, has been silently doing with evolution what opposition and controversy could not do. It has not only disclosed the true values of evolution, but it has also revealed its inherent limitations and defects. To the consideration of these very important limitations and defects let us now turn our attention.

VII

The most marked defect of evolution is in its entire failure to recognize and explain personality, human and divine. The individual, evolution knows and helps to explain; the individual as a person it does not know. The most that evolution can say of this subject-object, beside whom all other existences pale and fade, is this, according to Professor Le Conte: "Some portion of the all-pervasive energy again individuates itself more and more, and therefore acquires more and more a kind of independent self-activity which reaches its completeness in man as self-consciousness and free-will."⁵

A portion of the all-pervasive energy which acquires a kind of independent self-activity, and finally reaches self-consciousness, is all that evolution can offer in place of that in-breathed spirit, in the image of God, that creature crowned with glory and honor whom the Old Testament gives us, that soul whom Jesus sets over against the whole world, that being "with large discourse of reason looking before and after," whom Shakespeare sings. Between these two we must choose—the portion of energy evolved from below and the self-conscious, supernatural, autonomous spirit coming from above.

⁵ *Evolution and Its Relation to Religious Thought*, p. 349.

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With man, science stops and philosophy begins. Here enters the philosopher. No ultimate problem can be settled without him. Never is he so needed as in an age of science. Too long the scientist has scorned him, as he too long has scorned the scientist. The stupendous self-assertiveness of evolution (it is no less) has been due to its pitiful ignorance of philosophy. Hardly a man among the leading evolutionists has been a thorough student of philosophy. Spencer discloses as much of himself in his autobiography. Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall—how much did they know of philosophy? Professor Le Conte states that he read a little philosophy, but never with much interest. The naïve ignoring of the problem of knowledge on the part of evolution philosophers is damaging evidence. It shows the panevolution philosophy to be one that is built upon the sands. And the clouds are rising and the rain descending fast upon it. Such ignoring of philosophy is an astonishing begging of a prior question. What if the very conception of evolution is imposed upon nature by the mind, instead of coming out of nature to the mind? What, then, becomes of panevolutionism? It is a case of the mind evolved saying to the matter that evolved it, "Why hast thou evolved me thus?" To which the mindless matter can

make no reply, for it knows not the speech of reason. This is not only tragedy; it is comedy as well.

It is a most significant fact that not only was this scientist, who did much to commend evolution to modern religious thought and to exhibit its theological values, a member of the faculty of the University of California, but so also was the philosopher who has done much to expose the limits of evolution and to uphold the sacred worth of personality which evolution overshadows—a modern apostle of freedom and personality, Professor George H. Howison. Thus truth corrects and balances itself, finding ever its own eternal equilibrium. With a lance as unerring as it is earnest, Professor Howison has penetrated to the fatal weakness of the evolution philosophy and revealed not only its inherent limitations, but its absolute dependence, as a law, upon the mind. For him, the great fact is “man the spirit, creative rather than created, who is himself the proximate source of evolution, the cooperating cause and lord of that world where evolution has its course.”⁶ When and how man, this lordly spirit from another realm, entered the process of animal evolution, assuming the developed physical and nascent mental nature prepared through long

⁶ *The Limits of Evolution*, p. 55.

æons for him, we may not know. Enough that he is here, explaining evolution rather than explained by evolution.

VIII

Not only does unlimited evolution submerge human personality; it also extinguishes Divine personality. Spencer is the true architect of a consistent philosophy of unlimited evolution. His conclusions follow his premises. Agnosticism is the very best that can be made out of an evolution that fills the whole horizon. By a fine act of his Christian faith, won long before he became an evolutionist, Professor Le Conte transcended the bounds of evolution, and by positing a God at the very beginning of the evolutionary process, found him again throughout.

But to interpret God (whom the soul comes to know first in its own consciousness, enlightened by Christianity) as Professor Le Conte interpreted him, as confined to nature and coming into the soul through nature, inevitably leads to pantheism. It was in vain that, prompted by his ardent devotion to the Christian revelation, Professor Le Conte strove to save his doctrine from pantheism. He himself was no pantheist, but his theology is pantheis-

tic. It has no recognition, no place, for the transcendent God, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ—the Personal Being, above nature as well as in nature.

Unless God is transcendent as well as immanent we are caught between the horns of a fatal dilemma—deism or pantheism. Can transcendence and immanence both be true of God? This is the great issue of theology. The strict logician, the man who measures truth with rule and compass, will say, "No; both cannot be true; our rules forbid." But a larger and profounder insight answers, "Both may be true of God, both *must* be true, or God is not God." The two attributes, as Aristotle said,⁷ are not mutually exclusive. God cannot at the same time be both good and bad, but he can be both here and there, both above and within his universe, though he cannot be identical with his universe and above it. Thus Christianity, affording in its higher unity a synthesis of Hebrew and Greek thought, presents him. Thus the souls sensitive to the deeper harmonies of truth and life find him.⁸

⁷ See Weber, *History of Philosophy*, p. 117.

⁸ Professor Le Conte himself saw this. With an instinctive denial of the pantheism which he beckons with one hand and waves away with the other, he says: "The only rational view is to accept both immanence and personality, even though we cannot clearly reconcile them" (p. 337).

“Enthroned above the world although He sit,
Still is the world in Him and He in it,
The self-same power in yonder sunset glows
That kindled in the lords of sacred writ.

“Though one with all that sense or soul can see,
Not prisoned in his own creation, He,
His life is more than stars or winds or angels;
The sun doth not contain Him, nor the sea.”⁹

IX

The limits assigned to this paper permit little more than the mention of other serious defects of evolution theology. Two at least are conspicuous. One is its absolute failure to account for Jesus Christ. Jesus, as the religious genius of the race, its moral and spiritual prototype and ideal, can no more be explained by evolution alone than a flower by the soil in which its roots are hidden. Sun as well as soil is needed to account for the flower; God and man for Jesus Christ. This priest after the order of Melchizedek, whom evolution can explain only as a racial epiphenomenon, a freak of nature, humanity has greeted as its revealer and goal, by whom alone nature and human nature can be understood, and through whom, by means of the ethical power of vicarious sacrifice, God and man are reconciled.

⁹ Richard Hovey.

In Jesus Christ we see consummated the real force which has effected the ascent of man, that is, the ideal, the goal, the final cause. Instead of resident forces we have nonresident ideals. No one recognizes this change more clearly than Professor Le Conte. "Organic evolution," he says, "is pushed onward and upward from behind and below. Human evolution is drawn upward and forward from above and in front by the attractive force of ideals." Blessed inconsistency of the true seer! But manifestly this is no longer evolution at all, according to Professor Le Conte's own definition, in which "resident forces" is one of the three determining factors. Evolution knows nothing of ideals; Jesus Christ is the ideal. Evolution knows nothing of finalities; Jesus Christ is a finality.

X

Finally, evolution furnishes a misleading and superficial estimate of evil. By confounding moral evil with physical evil, evolution theology is duped into accrediting moral evil as only good in disguise, virtue in the making, fostering thus a conception of life based upon a half-truth and fraught with serious consequences to the individual and to society. In common with all the philosophizing evolutionists, Professor

Le Conte, though stoutly protesting against moral evil as "sin, moral disease, more dreadfully contagious and deadly than any organic disease," is nevertheless borne on by the current of his evolutionism to pronounce, not only its possibility, but itself "a necessary condition of all progress, and preeminently so of moral progress."¹⁰ How much deeper, saner, truer to human fact and consciousness is Paul's attitude toward evil! A dark, inexplicable mystery Paul conceives it, something or some one opposed to God, which we must resist with all our might, because its very nature is inherently and forever hateful, which man by the grace of Christ can destroy but can never subjugate, and yet whose effects an all-wise God, an overruling Providence, doth so dispose and frustrate that it may work together with other human experiences for good.

As evolution knows nothing of sin as such, so it can know nothing of regeneration as an extra-cosmic process, nor of that Holy Spirit through whom we have communion with the spiritual realm.

XI

Such are some of the values and defects, the worths and wantages of the theology which

¹⁰ *Evolution and Its Relation to Religious Thought*, p. 373.

has grown up alongside of agnosticism and materialism—as if to challenge their dim and dismal conclusions—out of the doctrine of evolution. Wheat and tares have grown together, but the harvest day of separation has come. Let us gather the wheat into the storehouses and cast the chaff away. And then let us turn to other harvest fields, for this one does by no means exhaust the divine resources.

Were evolution to be disproved *in toto* tomorrow, hardly a progressive and thoughtful student of theology but would feel himself the poorer. For evolution has stimulated and benefited theology, though it has not remade it. Narrowed horizons never suit the man of faith; he will not willingly part with any true gains that have been gathered in any field of God's truth. Happily no such result is to be anticipated. Well-meaning theologians assure us from time to time that evolution is going to pieces. But we know that they have simply caught the echoes of the disputes of evolutionists over the extent of natural selection or the range of variation or some other side issue. Over the main issue there is no controversy. Evolution is virtually established. Nevertheless the whole tendency to-day, not only in philosophy and theology, but in science itself, in what Lloyd Morgan has called "the evolution of evolu-

tion," is *to limit the boundaries of evolution*. Those bounds are fixed at least at the spiritual nature of man. No universalizing of evolution can account for personality. Only a philosophy of evolution, not a science of evolution, can venture to include that which no science can measure nor philosophy fathom—the soul. If the contributions of evolution to theology have proved to be less inclusive and reconstructive than such a buoyant, truth-devoted spirit as Professor Le Conte, in the high tide of conquest, imagined, we are not the less grateful to him for that insight of faith and boundlessness of enthusiasm which discerned and heralded the theistic character of the new truth.

XII

Yet it is with no slight sense of relief and reassurance that the theologian returns to the old, old verities and the old, old problems with the consciousness that evolution has neither sunk nor solved them. What should we do without these problems, so persistent, so engaging, so disappointing yet so fascinating, so luminous yet so insoluble? It is a noble privilege to hold high converse with these problems daily and to incite fresh and earnest minds to face them devoutly and hopefully. I be-

lieve in these problems of theology. Like the Scriptures themselves, they are profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for discipline which is in righteousness. Theology is a science rather than a system, a discipline rather than a dogmatic deliverance. Religion would be but a scant and narrow inclosure without its mysteries and its problems. Milk for babes the church has, strong meat also for strong minds. And yet, theology is not wholly brawn and sinew. No more than philosophy is she

“harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo’s lute.”

There is such a thing as experiential, heart-to-heart theology. May its day be hastened! The mood of the hour, which disparages and evades theology, will pass. Her office is not yet fulfilled. The future beckons. Nor are her problems wholly insoluble. New and large glimpses of mist-enveloped realities appear. New viewpoints open. Especially are we of to-day aroused to fresh anticipations in the application of the Christocentric principle to theology. Progress rules in the realm of theology, as everywhere throughout God’s unfolding universe. This, evolution has helped us to understand. With new faith and confi-

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dence theology may go forward to her task, exclaiming with Browning's Paracelsus:

"If I stoop
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
It is but for a time. I press God's lamp
Close to my breast; its splendor, soon or late,
Will pierce the gloom: I shall emerge one day."

MYSTICISM AS EXPERIENCE

IF religion were not so deep, so manifold, and so persistent a reality, it might be possible to fear that humanity is drifting into nonreligion. Certainly, old conventions and standards are breaking up. Yet in the very midst of the disintegration a new reconstruction of social Christianity is taking place, and in the swirl and current of secularism and hedonism a secret longing for spiritual reality is making itself felt. Men are searching after the mystic cord that leads out of the labyrinth which they have constructed. Religious experience finds its highest, or at least its most intense fulfillment and expression in mysticism. Renewed interest in historic mysticism is significant, but it is only a slight indication of a deeper search. There is no desire to revive the mysticism of a past age. Oriental mysticism is turned to as a help rather than as a finality.² The mediæval mystics are being studied as religious adepts, but with no thought of imitation. Emerson expressed the spirit of the age in his lines:

¹ From *The Homiletic Review*, July, 1913.

² Exception must be made of certain cults now flourishing in America.

“I like a church, I like a cowl,
 I love a prophet of the soul,
 Yet not for all his faith can see
 Would I that cowed churchman be.”

Nor is it quite Emerson's type of mysticism that the age desires. Perhaps there is no better expression of the attitude of our time toward mysticism than that contained in a verse of George Croly's beautiful hymn:

“I ask no dream, no prophet ecstasies,
 No sudden rending of the veil of clay,
 No angel visitant, no opening skies;
 But take the dimness of my soul away.”

What will take the dimness of the soul away? Not a new religious philosophy, or theology, or psychology. Not a new civic righteousness, or a new social order. All these are effects, not causes. They do not reach the heart of our need. The hunger after reality, the longing to find the central source and secret of all the vast complex of forces and phenomena in which we find ourselves, will be satisfied by nothing less than an answer that conveys a direct and experienced assurance. Until we are able to say: “This truth, this life, this reality is mine, my own by personal experience,” there will still be dimness of soul, insecurity, vacillation. Can anything besides mysticism furnish this indubitable sense of certainty?

I

Must we, then, to gain this boon of assurance, take with it all that mysticism has stood for in the past?—its asceticisms, its absolutisms, its seclusions, its visions, its trances, its ecstasies? Are these essential and inalienable parts of its life? Are they not rather accidents, attachments, forms of expression which grew out of the ideas and atmosphere of the times in which successive groups of mystics flourished? It would be impossible, it is true, to detach Anthony from the desert, or Saint Francis from Lady Poverty, or Thomas à Kempis from his cell, or to wrench Jonathan Edwards from Calvinistic New England, or Wordsworth from the Lake Country, or Emerson from Concord. Environment, intellectual, material, religious, must have much to do in forming the type and expression of mystical experience; yet it does not make the mystic. It is he who makes his environment clothe his inner life.

II

When we come to search for the very soul and core of mysticism all that is adventitious and temporal, however close it may seem to be wrought into the very texture of the mystical life, falls away and we see the real singleness

and simplicity that constitute its strength. Mysticism may be resolved into three fundamental principles: direct, individual experience of spiritual truth, the culture of the soul by contemplation, the dedication of the self in love. The other mystic truths and virtues cluster about these three. The heart of mysticism, that is, is personal and human. As such it is attainable wherever the human spirit rises to the highest level.

The nearer we get to the pure and simple mysticism which realizes these cardinal principles, the nearer we come to the type that is valid in every age and that meets the need of our own. The mysticism of Jesus was at once the deepest and strongest that the world has seen. Yet it was most simple and normal, marred by no extremes, irradiated by no ecstasies. It seems almost prosaic beside that of some of the more dramatic of the mystics, and yet it possessed a calm vitality and power that leave theirs almost childish by comparison.

It is to a sane, simple, normal mysticism, as we see it exemplified in Jesus—a mysticism that goes below all outward forms and expressions to the unchanging substratum of the religious life, and yet is able to adjust itself to and appropriate the larger meaning of life

which has come to our age—that we must look for healing and hope for our modern life.

Professor Eucken writes as follows regarding the mysticism needed to-day:

“The desire for the presence of the Infinite at the individual point may be characterized as an approximation to mysticism. Indeed, we need both a metaphysic and a mysticism; but we want both in a new form, not in the old. It seems to us preposterous to declare that necessary demands of the spiritual life are finally disposed of because the older solution has become inadequate. If man does not in some way succeed in appropriating the spiritual life, if it is not actively present as a whole within him and animating him, then his relation to the spiritual life remains forever an external one, and this life cannot acquire a complete spontaneity in him, can never become a genuine life of his own. But the older mysticism was the offspring of a worn-out age, which primarily reflected upon quietness and peace, and was under the influence of a philosophy that sought the truth in striving toward the most comprehensive ideal, and saw in all particularity a defect. And so, to be completely merged in the formless infinite could be regarded as the culmination of life. As the spiritual life is to us, on the contrary, an in-

creasing activity and creation, a world of self-determining activity, so its being called to life at individual points is a rousing of life to its highest energy; in this also a continual appropriation is necessary."³

Here is a word of rich significance as to the true meaning of mysticism and its relation to the spiritual need of our age. It reveals at once the inadequacy of the older mysticism and the potency and promise of the new.

III

From such a mysticism, sane, strong, simple, will come the relief of the restlessness, the confusions, the wrongs, and the doubts of modern life. Nothing else will suffice. In religion lies the key to the solution of the human problem, and mysticism is the heart of religion.

To be more explicit: what needs most to be done for our age and why may we expect mysticism to accomplish it?

In the first place, the spirit of mysticism alone can give to our modern life the unity which it so greatly lacks. Never was humanity so torn and dizzied by diverse and often conflicting interests as now. The difficulty to-day is not where to lay one's head, but

³ *Life's Basis and Life's Ideal*, pp. 246, 247.

when. We are the victims of an overcomplex civilization. As Charles Wagner wrote in that wise message to our time, *The Simple Life*:

“The complexity of our life appears in the number of our material needs. It is a fact universally conceded that our needs have grown with our resources. This is not an evil in itself, for the birth of certain needs is often a mark of progress. . . . But if certain needs exist by right and are desirable, there are others whose effects are fatal, which, like parasites, live at our expense.”⁴

There is no escape from this tyranny of overcivilization, from the pressure of problems and the hopeless maze of conflicting interests and activities, unless we can find a unifying power clear enough and strong enough to introduce self-guidance, order, mastery, into the turmoil and confusion.⁵

⁴ Chap. i.

⁵ There is, to be sure, a kind of skillful, superficial handling of life which has no real unifying power. “My artificial self becomes the only self I am acquainted with. This self is built up according to self-conscious standards of criticism, universal in character, derived largely from my social consciousness, and passing current in the world, just because I have thus duly universalized myself. It is a well-known selfhood—known in fact through and through, empty of mystery—well behaved, also, conventionally confirmed in its own successful technic of self-handling, the man of the city and of the world, betraying at every point the failure of privacy, of recourse to the individual I am, the sealing of spontaneity, the formal hardening of the heart, the unhumanizing of men by over-contact with humanity, the strain of general attitudes not wholly naturalized in oneself.”—Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, p. 417.

It is a fascinating world in which we live to-day. Art, science, nature, literature, amusements, social life permeate all social strata and offer more and more to stimulate and attract minds of all types and tastes. The modern man is dazzled by the wares and allurements of modern life. He is easily caught in the mesh of the external world, and loses his self-identity in it. Many of these interests are unselfish and altruistic, and the better man responds to the appeal of these, and in so far as he lends himself to them is enlarged and ennobled by them. Yet he does not get down beneath them to the secret of his selfhood, nor find the one thing that he as a self can best be and do. Doubtless it is his own fault chiefly, yet it is due in part to the complexity and externalism of the life in which he finds himself. "To what end, then," questions Schleiermacher, "this greater power over matter if it does not further the real life of the spirit?"⁶

There is no way out of this externalism, no way to find oneself and thus to take command of the outer life and reduce it to unity, except to find and enter into the spirit life, the world of personality where our true selfhood lies. Thence having found the "perfect law of liberty," one can master the outer life and re-

⁶ *Monologues*, chap. iii.

duce it to unity and make it serve and embody the life of the spirit.⁷

From a superficial viewpoint the mystical principle seems extremely ill adapted to serve as unifier and organizer of life's activities. It appears to be so absorbing, so other-worldly, as to inhibit other activities and interests and reduce life to a tame, angelic *tête-à-tête* with the Infinite. Von Hügel, in his discussion of this difficulty, quotes the following from the Danish mystic Kierkegaard: "The absolute is cruel, for it demands *all*, while the relative ever continues to demand *some* attention from us"⁸ But the attention that the absolute demands is one that can act through the relative. That which is best in the finite is enhanced by means of an undercurrent of devotion to the Infinite. Love of God does not conflict with love of neighbor, but increases it. The only way to serve God is by serving men. There are times, the mystic holds, when the whole and undivided attention must be concentrated on the Absolute, but those periods need occupy but a limited amount of time. The Absolute does demand all in the sense that the time given to "secular pursuits" (a phrase entirely alien to

⁷ Compare the chapter on "The Personalizing of Life," in my *Personality and the Christian Ideal*.

⁸ *The Mystical Element of Religion*, ii, 353.

the mystic mind), recreation, everything, shall all be undergirt and transfused with devotion to the Absolute. As Jacob Boehme has it: "Let thy hands or head be at labor, thy heart ought nevertheless to rest in God."⁹ Such a mysticism as that cannot fail to give unity to life, selecting, ordering, harmonizing all pursuits and interests and filling them all with the one pervasive and passionate interest, God. Lives thus unified, as we have known them or known of them, have not been lives out of touch with the modern world on its best side, nor cold to human interests and joys, but lives of exceptional breadth, warmth, and vitality, permeated through and through with a single purpose and attuned to one all-harmonizing note. We find, that is, that mysticism has the power not only to unify, but by that very fact the power to enlarge.

IV

The new mysticism alone can give to life freedom and fullness. The older mysticism lacked here. It gave depth, intensity, strength to life, but not fullness. Heroic, clear-visioned, large-minded, as the mystics of the Middle Ages and those of the Reformation were, they were a little afraid of life. They shrank from

⁹ *The Supersensual Life*, p. 65.

its possibilities; they distrusted its attractions. They found the right key to life, simplicity, but they did not use it to unlock all of the chambers in which great treasure lay hidden. They preferred the humbler rooms and the lowest places. They knew that all things were theirs, but they did not take possession of them. No one can be a mystic in any age who does not share their principle of values. They knew that one has no right to the good things of the world who does not take them as a son of God; but they did not realize how much one may rightly appropriate in gratitude. Having the one thing needful, they did not much concern themselves with the many things lawful.

The spirit of limitation, even though it be self-limitation, does not fit our modern world; we have come to know too well the goodness and largeness of life. Unless the modern mystic can take life in its amplitude, mold it, master it, he cannot exert the influence that the mystic of the Middle Ages possessed under another *Weltanschauung*. Can he be true to the mystical ideal and yet swing out into a fuller tide of life?

Perhaps we shall best find our answer by turning to one or two of the typical mystics of our own time. Probably no man in the later

American pulpit has been more distinctly mystical, both in his personality and his message, than Phillips Brooks. His face, his voice, his manner, his utterance, were all those of a mystic; and a mystic we find him as portrayed in his biography. Yet how rich and full a life he lived, so many-sided, so outreaching and varied in its interests and sympathies—a life enriched by art, travel, music, literature, society—full to the banks with joy and service! These volumes, replete with movement and fascination, are indicative of the nature of the life they record. Yet the most attractive parts are not those that chronicle the outward contacts and influences, but those that give us glimpses of the inward development. The thoughts recorded, for example, in those pregnant years in the theological seminary at Alexandria, and the years following, are as truly the reflections of a mystic as are those of the *Imitatio Christi* or the *Diary* of David Brainerd. Yet how great the contrast! Here, for instance, is a typical aspiration in verse:

“Oh, for a wider life where flower
 With more of breath gains more of bloom;
 With more of peace since more of power,
 And more of rest since more of room.”¹⁰

¹⁰A. V. G. Allen, *Life and Letters of Phillips Brooks*, i, 239.

The second volume contains a picture of Bishop Brooks' study in Boston. Contrast its furniture, its statuary, its pictures, its shelves of books, its atmosphere of comfort and culture with the bare, cold, comfortless cell of Henry Suso, with its crucifix and instruments of self-torture. Yet each was the retreat of a soul in communion with God.

Almost equally radiant in the wealth of its human interests and influences, as well as in its mystical quality, was the life of that winsome modern woman, Alice Freeman Palmer, as it is so sympathetically and skillfully described by Professor Palmer. Hers was a habit of life in striking contrast with that of Saint Teresa or Catherine of Siena. Little of its ministrant hours was given to direct, uninterrupted intercourse with God; and yet, "He was her steady companion, so naturally a part of her hourly thought that she attached little consequence to specific occasions of intercourse."¹¹ Doubtless it is only the rarer and more fortunate souls that can maintain so deep and steady a spiritual life with so little of seclusion and effort. And yet does not such a life reveal the very highest and finest kind of mysticism?

It is not always easy to detect the modern

¹¹ P. 347.

mystic, vital, active, absorbed in service, in fresh touch with all that is going on about him, yet nourishing his soul at a well of water within springing up into everlasting life—John Bigelow, journalist, diplomat, art critic, “first citizen of New York,” yet feeding his soul on the writings of Swedenborg and in attendance at the little New Church chapel on East Thirty-fifth Street;¹² Dr. Grenfell, sailor, physician, friend of a forsaken people to whom he has brought untold material as well as spiritual good with his herd of reindeer and his plans for social and economic betterment, yet a student and lover of the Scripture and a devoted follower of the Master;¹³ Helen Keller, scholar, woman of culture, bathed in a mystic faith that is the deepest secret of her marvelous unfolding—such lives as these reveal to us how real and beautiful is the presence of the mystical life in our so prosaic and material age.

The mystics are everywhere still, scattered through all the ranks and ways of human life. One of the most illuminating results of the inquiries conducted by Starbuck, Coe, Pratt,

¹² Compare John Bigelow, *The Bible That Was Lost and Is Found*.

¹³ In his Noble Lectures, *The Adventure of Life*, Dr. Grenfell, while showing on every page the practical and common sense turn of his mind, has nevertheless presented an intimate revelation of a vital mystical fellowship with the living Christ, of whom he says at the close: “There is no life but the life which comes from him; to me, as I have said, the rest is merely existence.”

and other students of religious psychology, is the revelation they have made of the wealth and variety of mystical experience all about us. Who would look for a mystic on the police force? And yet he has been found, writes Mr. Trine:

“I know an officer of our police force who has told me that many times when off duty, and on his way home in the evening, there comes to him such a vivid and vital realization of his oneness with this infinite Power, and this Spirit of peace so takes hold of and fills him, that it seems as if his feet could hardly keep to the pavement, so buoyant and so exhilarated does he become by reason of this inflowing tide.”¹⁴

Men and women, humble and unknown, have at the touch of the religious investigator disclosed phases of mystic experience, so real, so individual, often so tender and beautiful as to awaken our surprise and wonder. It is as if a veil had suddenly been drawn back from commonplace human beings, revealing a spiritual individuality that we had never dreamed was there. Have any romances of our day been more fascinating than those which Harold Begbie has uncovered to us?¹⁵

¹⁴ William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 393.

¹⁵ *Twice Born Men; Souls in Action*.

Idiosyncrasy, incongruity, individualism, doubtless color many of these mysticisms, but underneath there is a current of strong and sane reality. Not one of these experiences but gives to the life it lights greater freedom and fullness. For mysticism is in its very nature expansive. It enlarges the soul vertically and, when blended with intellectual strength, education, and culture, horizontally as well. Truly, as Shakespeare has it,

“out of these convertites
There is much matter to be heard and learned.”¹⁶

¹⁶ *As You Like It*, Act V, Scene II.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AND CHRISTIAN UNITY¹

ANY fair-minded observer, ignorant of the history and present condition of the Christian Church, upon reading the New Testament would say, "Here surely is a religion so simple, so vital, so rational, and so spiritual that its followers can have no possible occasion or excuse for quarreling or disfellowshipping one another." Are we, then, Christians?

One of our most familiar and beloved hymns has as its opening line: "Blest be the tie that binds." What is that tie? Is it a doctrinal tie, or a sentimental tie? It is neither. It is *the tie of Christian experience*.

One knows very well when he has it and when he shares it. It is a life in his soul and thus a tie that binds him to others. In the strength and hope of it he takes up the task of winning himself and of making this a better world, and because of it he joins heart and hand with his fellow Christian, that together they may take possession of the world for God in the name of Christ, for this too is a part of the experience. It is in some way bound up

¹ Reprinted from *The Biblical World*, vol. xlv, No. 4, April, 1915.

with a personal, spiritual Being who is greater than the experience and from whom it comes. All this is very clear and real. But when these convinced and united experients, these sharers of a new faith and a new life, begin to define; trouble begins. One says his experience means so and so; this is the doctrine and it involves these other doctrines; and another and another say, "Yes, so it is to us, so it must be." But another says: "It does not look so to me, you must be wrong; this is the meaning, this the doctrine."

Or, these sharers of a common experience, finding that they need symbols and forms of worship and methods of organization to maintain this inner life, institute certain rites and lay down certain forms of government and discipline. And having different ideas and preferences they begin to diverge, and as they become centered upon the externals rather than the reality that underlies them, differences lead to disagreement, separation, strife.

And then one party begins to call another "heretics, schismatics, enemies of orthodoxy." Thus division and subdivision occur. Sect creates sect, denomination creates denomination, party creates party. And here we are. It's an old story and a sad one. But the main question is: *What are we going to do about it?*

Well, the first thing to do is manifestly to go back, or, rather, to go *down*, to the fundamental reality itself and there to find again our one foundation, our common faith, our elemental tie that binds. How sure that foundation is, how unshakable, how imperishable, we have forgotten—lost in the maze of our creeds, our theologies, and our politics.

“But are there not many forms of Christian experience?” Surely, there are. As many and varied they are as the shades of light in the sunset sky or the colorings of the rose. But each is a form of the one common experience, a manifestation of the one Spirit, just as each color consists of broken rays of the one light. The man of the sudden conversion may not say to him of the slow unfolding, “I have no need of you.” Nor may he of the gradual growth say to him of the swift surrender, “I have no need of you.” For we are all made to drink of one and the same Spirit. And when we go together to the same Fountain in prayer we learn the common source of our faith and our common brotherhood.

Another objector arises. “Is not life, conduct, character,” he asks, “rather than experience, the more vital thing?” “What is the worth of an experience if conduct contradicts it?” The question is certainly pertinent. One

is reminded of the old Negro in the prayer-meeting who, as the story goes, arose and said: "Bred'ren, I'se broken all de commandments, but thank de Lord, I'se got my 'ligion still." There is not much value in that kind of religious experience, it must be admitted. But that is hardly a typical working of Christian experience. If it were, Christianity wouldn't have lasted long. Normal Christian experience reveals itself in *life*. It issues in right conduct, as the flower passes into the fruit. Automatically? No. Nothing happens automatically in the spiritual realm. But faith nerves the will and braces the determination, and out of the purified heart flow pure deeds. Paul expressed the secret of it all when he said: "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, all things are become new." "In Christ." Can you analyze that? Can you define it? That is experience, not theology. Out of that experience, *life*; in it, *unity*; after it, *freedom*. I see no way to a unified church, a revitalized Christianity, a convinced world, but this: the recovery and recognition of the one fundamental Christian experience, or, if you prefer, Christian faith—the two are practically the same—underlying all creeds, theologies, cults, enterprises.

But one thing is needful. Oh, all ye fierce

warriors of the faith, Athanasians and Arians, Augustinians and Pelagians, Abelards and Bernards, Luthers and Zwinglis, Calvins and Servetuses, Reformers and Remonstrants, Anglicans and Dissenters, Puritans and Quakers, Old School and New School, Conservatives and Liberals, but one thing is needful—faith, love, Christ in the soul, Christian experience. Every Christian knows what that reality is and what it means, though it can be defined about as accurately as life, or light, or electricity, or anything else that is too real for definition.

The trouble has come—has it not?—from substituting something closely connected with this great uniting reality for the *reality itself*. The *church*, for instance, in which this experience occurs, has been substituted for the experience; the *Bible*, with which the experience is linked, has been substituted for it; and often *a doctrine about Christ*, for Christ himself. It is perfectly natural and understandable that a medium or a definition of a reality should thus be substituted for the reality itself; but the result is confusion, trouble, dissension, disaster.

What then? Is theology of no account? Is Christian doctrine valueless? On the contrary, as we have found, theology, which is the interpretation of Christian experience, is of the utmost value. It grows out of experience as

the branch grows out of the stock and is as necessary to its life.

Christian Experience might well address Christian Doctrine in the language of Christ in the Fourth Gospel to his disciples: "I, Experience, am the Vine; ye, Doctrines, are the branches. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, so neither can ye except ye abide in me. If any doctrine abide not in me, it is cast forth as a branch and is withered and men gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned."

Precisely that has happened to a good many doctrines in our day. But when doctrine abides in experience, when it represents the life of the spirit expressing itself in intellectual leaf and blossom and fruit, it is needful and nourishing. Through it experience itself is enriched and advanced.

Let me offer an illustration. The disciple who wrote our Fourth Gospel was "far ben," as the Scotch would say, in his experience of Christ. He knew what it was to abide in the living Vine. He was also a student, a profound thinker. In the course of his study and reflection he had fallen in with a philosophical concept, current in his time, which is known as the Logos. With that profound philosophic conception he prefaced his interpretation of the

person and life of his Lord in those calm, majestic words that take one to the very heart of the secret of all existence: "In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God and the Logos was of God." "Through him [not *by* him] were all things made. . . . And the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father—full of grace and truth." *There is theology at its very best, reverent, deep, moving*—theology saturated in experience and pervaded with the Spirit; and this luminous conception runs through all the wonderful chapters that follow. This illustrates how our ideas enter into our experiences and our experiences into our ideas. A new idea is often like a shaft of light thrown into a darkened room where we were dwelling in the midst of realities that we knew and felt and yet did not clearly see. In its light we see as well as touch divine things.

Apply this to the Bible as a whole. Anyone who has lived at all responsively in the atmosphere of the Bible knows that it is a sacred and life-giving book, knows, indeed, that it is inspired. As Professor George Mooar used to say, "The Bible is inspired because it is inspiring." And yet one may hold a *theory* of inspiration which stands in the way of his fullest

appreciation of the largest meanings and deepest values of the Bible, a theory which reduces, or tends to reduce, all its sunlit peaks and shadowed valleys to one *dead level*. Such was my own conception as a boy, and I diligently plowed through all the dreary chapters of Leviticus and Numbers, spending time which might a thousand times better have been spent upon the Psalms and the Gospels, because I supposed it was all a necessary part of one miraculously given revelation. I have since come to see that when one accepts the guidance of the Spirit in his own mind and soul he will come to understand that certain parts of the Bible are incomparably nobler than others, that it contains a progressive and not a static revelation and is a book of religion and not of science or casuistry or predictions.

Upon the basis of an idea of inspiration wholly out of keeping with the spirit and teaching of the Bible itself, doctrines have been extracted from it which were never there. For instance, I for one am as certain that no such doctrine as the Augustinian and Calvinistic doctrine of the Fall of Man in Adam as essential to faith is taught in the Bible as I am certain that the doctrine that God is our Father and we his children *is* taught there. There is, to be sure, a Fall story in the book of Genesis,

full of suggestive truth, but no *doctrine* of the Fall. There is in the Epistle to the Romans a very striking parallel between a rabbinical doctrine of the universality of the Fall and that of Redemption in Christ. Paul was not teaching Adam but Christ. If he were to come back to-day, he might well ask: "How did you manage to make so much of that doctrine of the Fall out of the letter I wrote to the Romans? That Fall doctrine was not mine; I simply took it to make more real the truth that I was teaching—the *greatness and completeness of Christ's redemption.*"²

There are, it is true, certain simple, cardinal doctrines growing *directly* out of experience, such as the Fatherhood of God, the Redemptive Personality of Christ, the guidance of the Spirit, the Life Immortal, upon which we all agree. It is upon these, next to faith itself, that we should throw our common emphasis. Upon less essential doctrines we should agree to differ.

That is not saying, let me repeat, that it does not matter what we think about doctrine. It does matter. It is of great concern,

² If the champion of exactness wishes to press the point by asking: "Paul would not have used the doctrine of the Fall in Adam if he had not believed it, would he?" I would answer: "Doubtless he did accept it, but that does not make it *his* doctrine. There is no reason to think he would ever have referred to it except as a means of enforcing his teaching concerning Christ."

it seems to me, that for the sake of the honor of Christianity, for the sake of young and inquiring minds growing up about us, we have the clearest, sanest, most reasonable theology possible, a theology that reflects the best thought and the best knowledge of our time—while anchored fast to the fundamental realities of the New Testament.

But some things matter vastly more than others that matter much. And the thing that always matters most, and especially just now, is that all Christians, New Theology and Old Theology, of every sect and denomination, stand together upon the one fundamental relation to Christ, where there is neither Old Theology nor New Theology, Orthodox nor Liberal, but Christ is all and in all.

“Love,” says the great apostle, “beareth all things.” It should be able to bear doctrinal differences. An increasing number of us are, I think, determined that doctrinal differences shall not shut us away from our brethren. It is always possible to get the better of the man who tries to exclude you, if it is done in the spirit and manner of Edwin Markham’s lines:

“He drew a circle that shut me out—
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in.”

It is no time to cherish misunderstandings and alienations and suspicions, when the forces of materialism and indifferentism and immorality are flooding in upon us as they are to-day. When men and women are drifting from their moorings and out upon a sea of loneliness and hopelessness, when young men and women are giving way to doubt and pessimism, when foes of the Kingdom are pointing the finger at a disunited and ineffective church, it is no time to be bickering among ourselves over theological and denominational differences.

If there is any scorn or self-satisfaction in the hearts of New Theology men, any hypercriticism, any failure to recognize the fundamental value of Christian experience, let us repent of it—lest we use our liberty as a cloak of bondage.

And if there is any bitterness toward their brethren on the part of the defenders of orthodoxy, any ungenerous and un-Christlike doubt of their sincerity and loyalty to the faith, should it not be flung to Gehenna where it belongs?

Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity—nay, how imperative, if we would be true to our faith in one Master and experience the truth which makes men free!

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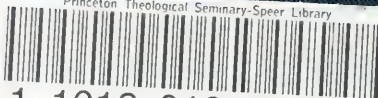
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